

**PLACE, LIFE HISTORIES AND THE POLITICS OF RELIEF:
EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF FRANCESCA WILSON,
HUMANITARIAN EDUCATOR ACTIVIST**

by

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ABSTRACT

This study adopts an auto/biographical approach to explore episodes in the life of the teacher, author and humanitarian activist Francesca Wilson (1888-1981). It is concerned with the process of researching and telling aspects of her life history as a means of contributing to the emerging historiography of women educator activists and Quaker women in international humanitarian relief in the first half of the twentieth century. It is structured around the concept of place as an interpretative device, and explores how three particular cities - Vienna (1919-22), Birmingham (1925-39), and Murcia (1937-39) - influenced her sense of identity and self and the trajectory of her subsequent life and activism on behalf of displaced people. Among the methodological aspects considered are issues of 'truth' and authorial voice, archival ambiguities and silences, and the role of networks and their representation in the archive. The study analyses her use of life histories for political and educational purposes, a theme that in itself raises other issues. Consequently, the use and exhibition of children's art as a vehicle for giving 'voice' to displaced children is also considered, alongside an examination of the visual and textual representation of children by humanitarian activists and non-governmental aid agencies.

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Parts of chapter two have been published as an article: Sian Roberts, "Exhibiting Children at Risk: child art, international exhibitions and Save the Children Fund in Vienna, 1919-1923", *Paedagogica Historica*, 45, nos. 1 & 2 (2009) pp 171-190, see appendix two.

Parts of chapter four have been published as an article: Sian Roberts, "'In the Margins of Chaos': Francesca Wilson and education for all in the 'Teacher's Republic'", *History of Education*, 35, no. 6, (2006) pp 653-668, see appendix three.

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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFSC	American Friends Service Committee
BA&H	Birmingham Archives and Heritage
BCPL	Birmingham Council for Peace and Liberty
COPEC	Christian Conference on Politics, Economics and Citizenship
CUFOS	Cambridge University Faculty of Oriental Studies Library
CUL	Cambridge University Library
ECECG	Edgbaston Church of England College for Girls
FFC	Fight the Famine Council
FL	Friends Library, London
FMW	Francesca Mary Wilson
FSC	Friends Service Council
FEWVRC	Friends Emergency War Victims Relief Committee
FUE	Federación Universitaria Escolar
IBA	International Brigades Archive
IBH	Isaline Blew Horner Papers
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IOE	Institute of Education Archives
KDC	Katherine D'Olier Courtney Papers
IWM	Imperial War Museum
LSEA	London School of Economics Archives
MML	Marx Memorial Library, London
NAEA	National Arts Education Archive
NCW	National Council of Women
RHUL	Royal Holloway, University of London Archives
SCF	Save the Children Fund
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
UoBSC	University of Birmingham Special Collections
WNMM	Warwickshire North Monthly Meeting
WEA	Workers' Educational Association
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WL	Women's Library, London

CHAPTER ONE

ANONYMOUS AND FORGOTTEN

But it is not just for their activities that I have written brief memoirs of these women, but because of their unusual personalities and because behind the 20th Century scene, their lives had a beneficent [sic] influence which deserves recording, although they themselves expected to remain anonymous and forgotten.¹

These words were written by the teacher, author and humanitarian activist Francesca Wilson in an introduction to her unfinished group biography of three female educator activists.² Francesca intended to publish her study in 1975 to mark the first United Nations International Women's Year when she herself would have been 87 years old.³ The quotation articulates her belief in the importance of telling the stories of the women activists with whom she had collaborated over the course of her long and active life. Ironically, it also anticipates the fate that was to befall Francesca's own life story, and those of her fellow international humanitarian activists, despite her repeated efforts to place aspects of it in the public domain.

This study engages with the 'biographical turn' apparent in both women's history and the history of education since the 1970s.⁴ It takes a two-pronged

¹ Francesca Mary Wilson, preface to *Three 20th Century Women of Action*, unpublished typescript, [c.1975] WL, KDC/K12/14 p 2

² The use of the term 'educator activists' draws upon Margaret Smith Crocco, Petra Munro, & Kathleen Weiler, *Pedagogies of Resistance: Women Educator Activists, 1880-1960* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999). See chapter two for a discussion of Francesca as biographer and her portrayal of the three women.

³ Wilson, *Three 20th Century Women of Action*, p 1

⁴ Ruth Watts, "Gendering the story: change in the history of education", *History of Education*, 34, no. 3 (2005) 225-241 p 230; see also Ruth Watts, "Collecting Women's Lives in 'National' History: opportunities and challenges in writing for the ODNB", *Women's' History Review*, 19,

approach. Firstly, taking Francesca as a case study, it adopts a biographical approach to explore the participation of women humanitarian educator activists in active relief work on an international stage with refugees and those affected by war in the first half of the twentieth century. In so doing it contributes to the limited historiography of humanitarian aid by women, and Quaker women in particular, in this period. Secondly, this study is concerned with exploring some of the methodological issues involved in taking a biographical approach to Francesca's life, specifically issues of authorial voice, representation, archival ambiguities and survival, and the role of place in the geography of a life. As a subject Francesca is particularly appropriate as she herself was both a biographer and an autobiographer who recognised the power of life stories to challenge dominant discourses. Throughout her life she displayed an acute and lively awareness of the widespread appeal and political usefulness of life stories. She employed auto/biographical practices both to raise public awareness of the humanitarian issues and educational campaigns in which she was active, and to create a place and a meaning for her own life story.

In this introductory chapter I will begin by locating the themes that are covered in this study in the literature on writing lives, and the lives of women educator activists in particular, and on the relevance of place as an interpretational device. The emphasis will then shift to outline the aims of my study and a discussion of the sources used. Finally, I will outline the structure and organisation of the subsequent chapters. However, before turning to the

no. 1 (2010) pp109-24. The latter appears in a special issue of the journal devoted to the subject of collecting women's lives demonstrating the continuing popularity of biographical approaches, see Alex Hoare *et al*, "Introduction: 'Becoming their most Intimate Scrutinizers': collecting women's lives", *Women's' History Review*, 19, no. 1 (2010) pp 1-5

literature and thematic review it should be emphasised that although this study takes a biographical approach it is not a 'cradle to grave' biography, but a partial account which concentrates in the main on Francesca's humanitarian activism in the 1920s and 1930s. A brief overview of Francesca's life is therefore required to enable the reader to place what follows in its temporal, geographical, and biographical context.

Biographical Overview

Francesca Mary Wilson was born into a middle class Quaker family in Newcastle upon Tyne on the 1st of January 1888. Following an education at the Central Newcastle High School for Girls and Newnham College, Cambridge, she qualified as a teacher. Whilst teaching in Gravesend during the First World War she became involved with Belgian refugees, and as a result temporarily abandoned her teaching career to undertake relief work abroad with the Society of Friends and the Serbian Relief Fund, initially working with children in France in 1916, and from 1917 with wounded and displaced Serbs in Corsica, North Africa and Serbia. In 1919 she moved to Vienna where she worked with the Quaker Relief Mission and Save the Children, before embarking on a period of famine relief work with a Quaker team in Russia in 1922-23. From 1925 she settled in Birmingham where she taught history at one of the city's elite schools, the Edgbaston Church of England College for Girls and involved herself with the welfare of refugees and displaced people. In the late 1930s she undertook relief work with the Quakers in Southern Spain during the Civil War and then with Spanish refugees in the



Figure 1: Francesca c. 1910

South of France. In 1939-40 she was in Hungary for the Polish Relief Fund before working for refugee organisations in the UK during the Second World War. At the end of the war she joined the newly formed United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) as a senior welfare worker working with the displaced survivors of Dachau in Southern Germany, and in that capacity also visited Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Austria. After the war she moved to London, where she taught for the WEA and the University of London adult education classes. In the 1940s and 1950s she toured Britain addressing public meetings on humanitarian aid and post-war reconstruction, and also broadcast on these issues. During her life Francesca published a number of books and was a prolific author of reportage and journalism, policy documents on displacement, practical guides to relief work, historical works and anthologies of travel writings, biography, and autobiographical accounts. She died in London on 4th of March 1981 aged 93.

From Biography to Auto/biography

But biography is many-sided; biography never returns a single and simple answer to any question that is asked of it.⁵

Life stories come in many guises - 'popular' and celebrity biography, literary and historical biography, autobiography and confessional (or so-called 'misery') memoir, cinematic 'biopic', and oral, family and community histories, all of which fit to differing degrees under the collective term 'life-writing'.⁶ During the past two decades life stories have enjoyed a popular and academic resurgence

⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 2nd edition (London: Penguin Books, 2000) p 204

⁶ Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p 73

that shows no sign of abating. We are living, in the words of the literary biographer Kaplan, in 'a culture of biography', in which daily discourse is largely shaped by issues of personality, celebrity and anecdote.⁷ This fascination with the lives of others is not a recent phenomenon; as Parke and Lee have demonstrated biography can trace its lineage to Greek and Roman origins. It was, however, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that it emerged as an identifiable and popular literary genre, encouraged by the development of print culture, increased literacy, imperialistic exploration, and new conceptions of the individual which recognised childhood as a distinct phase of life.⁸ Samuel Johnson, often credited as the founder of 'modern' biography, identified its appeal to the reader in his much-quoted piece in *The Rambler* as the recognition that: 'We are all prompted by the same motives, all deceived by the same fallacies, all animated by hope, obstructed by dangers, entangled by desire, and seduced by pleasure'.⁹ Contemporary writers agree that the genre's appeal lies in the ease with which the reader can identify with the subject; the ability to 'touch familiar chords in readers' who are 'always drawn to moments of intimacy, revelation, or particular inwardness'.¹⁰

Despite its popularity there was little place within biographical literature for

⁷ Justin Kaplan, "A Culture of Biography", in Dale Salwak, ed., *The Literary Biography: Problems and Solutions* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996) 1-11 p 1; a similar point is made in Jenny Bourne Taylor & Cora Kaplan, "Editorial", *Reading Life Writing, New Formations*, 67, (2009) 7-9 p 7

⁸ Catherine N. Parke, *Biography: Writing Lives* (New York & London: Routledge, 2002); Lee, *Biography*, chapters 2 & 3

⁹ Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, 60, 13 Oct 1750 quoted in James L. Clifford, ed., *Biography as an Art: Selected Criticism 1560-1960* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962) p 41

¹⁰ There is a wealth of writing testifying to the popularity of both genres. These two examples are from Vandiver, quoted in Craig Kridel, ed., *Writing Educational Biography: Explorations in Qualitative Research* (New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1998) p 3 and Hermione Lee, *Body Parts: Essays in Life-writing* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2005) p 3

theoretical and critical engagement with the form until relatively recently.¹¹ In their introduction to *The Seductions of Biography*, a volume intended as a contribution to the process of 'rethinking' biography, Rhiel and Suchoff drew attention to biography's 'lack of legitimacy in the worlds of contemporary critical theory, social historiography, and even highbrow journalism'.¹² The literary critic Ellis agreed, reflecting that Disraeli's famous description of biography as 'life without theory' was an accurate summation of a literature dominated by historical surveys of the genre and collections of essays that aim to introduce readers to 'behind-the-scenes secrets' rather than engage in any form of sustained critical or theoretical analysis.¹³ All three concluded that the answer in part lay with biography's historical identification as the heroic narrative of one central, and usually white and male, subject in the age of the 'death of the author' and 'the disappearance of man'.¹⁴ Biography was considered irrelevant and 'theoretically unexciting'.¹⁵

In contrast, autobiography has received far more theoretical analysis, much of it from feminist critics attracted by its 'complex and problematic' nature.¹⁶

Writing of the 'excitement of autobiography' Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield, for example, described a genre that 'explodes disciplinary boundaries' and

¹¹ Virginia Woolf was a notable exception in the early 20th century and engaged in considerable questioning and experimentation of the form through such works as her novel *Orlando* and her attempt to tell Elizabeth Barrett Browning's life through the biography of her pet dog in *Flood*. She was also a prolific essay writer on life writing. Her close friend and fellow member of the Bloomsbury circle Lytton Strachey is often credited with changing biography for ever with the publication of his *Eminent Victorians*, see Lee, *Biography*, pp 72-92

¹² Mary Rhiel & David Suchoff, eds., *The Seductions of Biography* (New York & London: Routledge, 1996) p 1; Lee, *Biography*, p 94

¹³ David Ellis, *Literary Lives: Biography and the Search for Understanding* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) pp 2-3, Rhiel & Suchoff, *The Seductions of Biography*, pp 3-4

¹⁴ Rhiel & Suchoff, *The Seductions of Biography*, pp 3-4

¹⁵ Carolyn Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan, 1860-1931* (London: Virago Press, 1990) p 243

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p 243

‘makes trouble’; a genre that is difficult to define, that is neither fact nor fiction, that is both personal and social.¹⁷ Consequently, for the feminist literary critics and historians exploring women’s constructions and expressions of the self, it was women’s autobiographical narratives that provided the ‘essential primary documents for feminist research’.¹⁸ In contrast biography, with its emphasis on the public face of ‘exceptional lives’, did not appear to be in sympathy with, or an effective vehicle for, the political and egalitarian agenda of the feminist history project.¹⁹ In her introduction to a special edition of *Gender and History* in 1990 Vammen articulated the concerns of both feminist and social historians, wary of the danger posed to feminist and ‘other progressive political projects’ by the cultural celebration of the individual ‘heroic narrative’ and the ‘restorative’ nature of much of women’s biography, which merely replaced ‘great men’ with ‘women worthies’.²⁰ Similarly Rhiel and Suchoff argued that it was not enough simply to represent new biographical subjects. For biography to become a medium for women and minority groups to challenge established cultural history and represent lives previously lost or unheard in the mainstream, then the traditional form also had to be called into question.²¹

¹⁷ Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury & Penny Summerfield, eds., *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods* (London: Routledge, 2000) p 1

¹⁸ Personal Narratives Group, eds., *Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989) p 4. Among the numerous examples of works of this nature are Estelle C. Jelinek, *Women’s Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1980); Shari Benstock, ed., *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women’s Autobiographical Writings* (London: Routledge, 1988); Martine Watson Brownley & Allison B. Kimmich, eds., *Women and Autobiography*, (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1999)

¹⁹ Lucy Bland & Angela V. John, “Editorial”, *Gender & History*, 2, no. 1 (1990), pp 1-2

²⁰ Tinne Vammen, “Modern English Auto/Biography and Gender, Introduction”, *Gender & History*, 2, no. 1 (1990) pp 17-21; see also Barbara Caine, “Feminist Biography and Feminist History”, *Women’s History Review*, 3, no. 2 (1994) pp 247-61

²¹ Rhiel & Suchoff, *The Seductions of Biography*, p 2

Biography is renowned for the conservatism of its readers and the lack of experimentation by its writers.²² Although a few well-established authors have felt at liberty to include some degree of experimentation, on the whole 'the life' tends to follow a more or less conventional path from cradle to grave. The element of interest is perceived to be in the subject's life, either for reasons of its exceptionality or its supposed 'representativeness', rather than on the mode of its production. In the collection of essays *Lives for Sale* Sutherland captured the prevailing attitude when describing the comfort of having a predetermined and unavoidably linear 'script' that leads inescapably from birth to the inevitable closure of death: 'There is, in biography, a "script" already written. Literary remains await. The life is there, you follow it, birth to grave, with whatever digressions and grace notes you can bring to it'.²³

Striking a note of dissent in an essay in the same volume, Pimlott regreted the lack of experimentation and the 'formulaic nature of even the best of contemporary biographical writing'.²⁴ Exhorting biographers to abandon the 'blockbuster' length, and the impossible aim of being 'definitive', he suggested that the biographer should aim to produce something akin to a portrait:

A good biography is like a good portrait: it captures the essence of the sitter by being much more than a likeness. A good portrait is about history, philosophy, milieu. It asks questions as well as answering them, brushstrokes are economical and always to the subtlest effect. Think Velasquez, Sargent, Freud. Biography can be like that.²⁵

²² Ben Pimlott, "Brushstrokes," in Mark Bostridge, ed., *Lives For Sale: Biographers' Tales* (London: Continuum, 2004) 165-70 p168; Kenneth Silverman, "Mather, Poe, Houdini", in Salwak, *The Literary Biography: Problems and Solutions*, 107-16 p 116

²³ John Sutherland, "No Respect", in Bostridge, *Lives For Sale*, 146-50, p146

²⁴ Pimlott, "Brushstrokes", p 168

²⁵ Ibid., p 170

As with autobiography much of the most interesting and experimental work in biographical writing developed under the influence of feminist scholarship which, informed by poststructuralist and postcolonial theories of self and truth, questioned the nature of the genre. Marcus and Stanley, for example, both argued for the blurring of the disciplinary boundaries between the differing genres of life writing including biography, autobiography, case-history, social history, psychoanalysis and oral history.²⁶ Stanley also argued for a recognition that the same critical modes of analysis are required by biography and autobiography. She developed 'auto/biography' as a means to dismantle the boundary between the biography of the subject, the autobiography of the author, and the active participation of the reader, in a process that recognises that each one of us will conceive, and reconceive, our own versions of the life story being told.²⁷ Making the 'intellectual autobiography' of the researcher, and her labour process in determining how the story is constructed, known to the reader is fundamental to the production of 'accountable knowledge'.²⁸ The reader should recognise throughout that the auto/biographer is engaged in the conscious construction of knowledge rather than its 'discovery', and that this construction is not value-free, but that the author is writing from a situated perspective to produce a particular interpretation from a range of possibilities. This rejection of the 'closed texts' of traditional biography is based on the acceptance that every reader 'is a biographer, producing their own authorised

²⁶ Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Criticism, Theory, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) pp 275, 278; Liz Stanley, *The auto/biographical I. The theory and practice of feminist auto/biography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) p 3

²⁷ Liz Stanley, "Feminist Auto/Biography and Feminist Epistemology", in Jane Aaron & Sylvia Walby, eds., *Out of the Margins: Women's Studies in the Nineties* (London: The Falmer Press, 1991) 204-19, p 206

²⁸ Liz Stanley, "Moments of Writing: Is There a Feminist Auto/biography?", *Gender & History*, 2, no. 1 (1990) 58-67, p 62

version of that life...Moreover, different readings by the same reader can produce different versions of the life'.²⁹

For Stanley therefore, the emphasis was on the auto/biographical process, on making visible that which is normally hidden, 'the way that the biographer understands the subject with which she deals'.³⁰ The auto/biographer must illustrate how her layers of understandings have developed or changed, while recognising that earlier interpretations are not invalid, merely different; produced at different times and in different circumstances, and part of a continually evolving relationship with the subject. In this auto/biography functions as a 'kaleidoscope':

you look and you see one fascinatingly complex pattern; the light changes, you accidentally move, or you deliberately shake the kaleidoscope, and you see a different pattern composed by the 'same' elements.³¹

Similar questions of the intellectual biography of the researcher are evident in the work of feminist historians of education and auto/biographers including Steedman, Weiler, Martin, and Goodman, alongside a shared conviction of their own political motivations.³² Their subjects are chosen for their ability to inform contemporary concerns, and an auto/biographical approach provides an effective framework within which to understand significant historical themes and societal changes. Historical biography provides transformative possibilities

²⁹ Stanley, *The auto/biographical I*, pp 7,154, 124-5

³⁰ Liz Stanley, "Biography as Microscope or Kaleidoscope? The case of 'Power' in Hannah Cullwick's Relationship with Arthur Munby", *Women's Studies International Forum*, 10, no. 1 (1987) 19-32, p 21

³¹ *Ibid.*, p 30

³² See for example Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain*; Crocco, Munro, & Weiler, *Pedagogies of Resistance*; Jane Martin & Joyce Goodman, *Women and Education, 1800-1980* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

for exploring concepts such as the origins of new ideas and ways of being, the social possibilities available to individuals and groups, and the relationship between educational processes, individual and group agency, and social change summarised thus by Finkelstein:

Indeed, biography constitutes a unique form of historical study that enables education scholars to explore intersections between human agency and social structure. Biographical studies situate historical storytelling at the margins of social possibility where social change originates, constraint and choice merge, large and small social structures intersect, cultural norms converge, and the relative force of political, economic, social and cultural circumstance becomes clear. Historical biography reveals the relative power of individuals to stabilize or transform the determinancies of cultural tradition, political arrangements, economic forms, social circumstances and educational processes into new social possibilities.³³

In *Pedagogies of Resistance: Women Educator Activists, 1880-1960*, Crocco, Munro and Weiler employ life history to 'help redress the marginalisation of women in the history of education'.³⁴ Using biographical studies of three pairs of American and African American women educator activists, their aim was to illustrate how education provided a transformative force which enabled them to live their lives as agents of change, shaping public opinion on questions of gender, race, education and democracy. The authors acknowledge their political motivation in drawing comparisons between their own contemporary political and educational concerns and their subjects' campaigning for progressive education with the intention of offering a model for contemporary

³³ Barbara Finkelstein, "Revealing Human Agency: The Uses of Biography in the Study of Educational History", in Kridel, *Writing Educational Biography*, 45-59, p 46

³⁴ Crocco, Munro, & Weiler, *Pedagogies of Resistance*, p 3

activists.³⁵ Rejecting the notion of 'exemplary heroines' and adopting Scott's definition of the subjects 'as sites - historical locations or markers - where crucial political and cultural contests are enacted and can be examined in some detail', they analysed the women's agency within the social and political networks and contexts which sustained their activism.³⁶ They explored the paradoxes and complexities of their life choices, and how the sense of alienation produced by their deviation from accepted behavioural norms often exacted a heavy personal cost. Similarly Martin and Goodman explored the motivation and agency of a group of British educator activists in *Women and Education, 1800-1980* using a collective auto/biographical approach to examine how their subjects' life histories contradict the dominant representation of women as passive 'victims' of a gendered educational system, and to provide an alternative discourse of women as active 'leaders' in the development of educational policy.³⁷ Elsewhere Martin wrote that her interest was in writing the history 'of radical women who see education as a way of changing the world'.³⁸

In her *Advice to Aspiring Educational Biographers*, DeSalvo advised writers of biography to 'focus on "the story" they want to tell about their subject's life, and to leave the rest to someone else'.³⁹ Writing of her own biographical work on Virginia Woolf, which initially focused on Woolf's childhood but developed into

³⁵ Ibid., pp 3-5. See also Kathleen Weiler & Sue Middleton, eds., *Telling Women's Lives: Narrative Inquiries in the History of Women's Education* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999)

³⁶ Ibid., p 10

³⁷ Jane Martin & Joyce Goodman, *Women and Education, 1800-1980*, p 2

³⁸ Jane Martin, "Reflections on writing a biographical account of a woman educator activist", *History of Education*, 30, no. 2 (2001) 163-76, p 166

³⁹ Louise DeSalvo, "Advice to Aspiring Educational Biographers", in Kridel, *Writing Educational Biography*, 269-71, p 270

a consideration of Woolf as an incest survivor, DeSalvo found that narrowing her focus in this way 'provided me with a way of learning much more about Woolf throughout her life than if I had tried to write a standard "birth to death" biography'.⁴⁰ The real significance does not lie in discovering and recounting every available fact about a life but in the trajectory of that life and how meaning is made and found. Similarly for Steedman, reading the signals given out by her subject, Margaret McMillan, provided an opportunity to experiment with the traditional structures of biography. She had originally conceived her biography of McMillan as a 'historical project' because 'the life story... is understood to illuminate ideas, ideologies, class and gender relations, and the social practices of a particular period of British history'.⁴¹ She soon realised that in McMillan she had chosen a woman whose life story itself 'blurred' the distinction between biography and autobiography.⁴² McMillan 'purported to write the biography of her sister Rachel, and in fact, wrote her own' whilst at the same time engaging in considerable fictionalisation in the process of telling and re-telling.⁴³ McMillan also appeared to Steedman to demand a treatment that deviated from the traditional forms of literary or political biography, and from the 'restorative' type of women's biography. Her answer was to develop a style of historical biography that 'elevates the political and social setting to the life above its narration' and which placed McMillan's life in the contexts of culture and class.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid., p 269

⁴¹ Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain*, p 245

⁴² Ibid., p 243

⁴³ Carolyn Steedman, *Past Tenses: Essays on writing, autobiography and history* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1992) p 159

⁴⁴ Ibid., p 160

The signals given out by Francesca also appear to demand a different way of telling. Her life story is, at times, an adventurous and uplifting story that could easily be told in a 'restorative' narrative. However, my aim is not to narrate a 'cradle to grave', 'heroic' story of her life, but rather to engage with the questions that she herself alluded to in the quotation that opened this chapter - questions about the place of a historical life story in contemporary life; its place within the archive, the landscape, and cultural memory; and how that place is influenced by the way in which a story is constructed and told. Her life raises questions about our understanding of the development of current attitudes to global conflicts, and international, national and personal responsibility for the displaced people caught up in them. Drawing on the auto/biographical framework outlined above, the story I want to tell is about Francesca's humanitarian and educational activism, and the way she used her own life story and those of the people with whom she came into contact, as educational and political tools. In so doing I hope to make a contribution to the hitherto largely neglected historiography of women's participation in international humanitarian relief in first half of the twentieth century, a somewhat surprising absence in the study of global conflict in this period when one considers the scale of the humanitarian response to war and displaced people.⁴⁵ One historian has ascribed this neglect to the fact that most historical work to date has focused on policy making and as women were largely excluded from national and international decision making arenas this translates into the silences in the historiography.⁴⁶ Recent work on the activities of individual

⁴⁵ Sybil Oldfield, "Compiling the First Dictionary of British Women Humanitarians", *Women's Studies International Forum*, 24, no. 6 (2001) 737-43 p 737

⁴⁶ Helen Jones, *Women in British Public Life, 1914-50: Gender, Power and Social Policy* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), pp 101-2

female humanitarian activists has begun to redress this gap, most notably the work of Oldfield.⁴⁷ There has also been a recent resurgence in biographical studies of individual women humanitarians.⁴⁸ Some attention has also been paid to particular events or causes, such as women's involvement with child refugees arriving in Britain, and women's involvement in relief and the 'Aid Spain' campaigns during the Spanish Civil War.⁴⁹ The paucity of literature on the twentieth century humanitarian activities of Quaker women is particularly surprising, given the relative scale of their involvement in international relief.⁵⁰ Indeed, histories of Quaker participation in twentieth century relief in general, by both men and women, are very limited and tend on the whole to have been written by Quakers and therefore from an 'insider' perspective.⁵¹ Greenwood in his history of Quaker relief maintains that, in contrast to the male-dominated

⁴⁷ Sybil Oldfield, *Women Humanitarians: A Biographical Dictionary of British Women Active between 1900 and 1950* (London: Continuum, 2001); Sybil Oldfield, "'It is Usually She': The Role of British Women in the Rescue and Care of the Kindertransport Kinder", *Shofar*, 23, no. 1. (2004) pp 57-70; see also Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminism in War and Peace* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989); for the most recent contribution to the historiography of women and relief see Katherine Storr, *Excluded from the Record: Women, Refugees and Relief 1914-1929* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010)

⁴⁸ See for example Susan Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2004); Angela V. John, *Evelyn Sharp. Rebel Woman, 1869-1955* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Clare Mulley, *The Woman Who Saved the Children. A Biography of Eglantyne Jebb Founder of Save the Children* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009)

⁴⁹ See for example Jim Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain: The Aid Spain Movement in Britain 1936-39* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986); Jim Fyrth & Sally Alexander, *Women's Voices from the Spanish Civil War* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991); Angela Jackson, *British Women and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Routledge, 2002); Kevin Myers, "Englishness, Identity and Refugee Children in Britain, 1937-1945" (PhD thesis, University of Coventry, 2000); Kevin Myers, "The Hidden history of refugee schooling in Britain: the case of the Belgians, 1914-18", *History of Education*, 30, no. 2 (2001) pp 153-162; Kevin Myers, "The Ambiguities of Aid and Agency. Representing Refugee Children in England 1937-8", *Cultural and Social History*, 6, no. 1 (2009) pp 29-46

⁵⁰ Most work on Quaker women's involvement with international humanitarian causes has focused on their participation in campaigns against the slave trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

⁵¹ See for example John Ormerod Greenwood, *Quaker Encounters Volume 1: Friends and Relief* (York: William Sessions Ltd., 1975); A. Ruth Fry, *A Quaker Adventure: The Story of Nine Years Relief and Reconstruction* (New York: Frank-Maurice Inc., [1926]); Shelia Spielhofer, *Stemming the Dark Tide: Quakers in Vienna 1919-1942* (York: William Sessions Ltd., 2001); David McFadden & Claire Gorfinkel, *Constructive Spirit: Quakers in Revolutionary Russia* (Pasadena: International Productions, 2004)

Friends Ambulance Unit, the FEWVRC had a far higher percentage of female participation. He estimated that of a total of 473 FEWVRC relief workers who served in Europe during 1914-18, 156 were women with a further 880 women involved in relief in the post-war period to 1923; during the Second World War 603 women were actively involved alongside 629 men.⁵² Although recent work by Holton, Mendlesohn, and Storr has to some extent begun to address this silence, international relief work remains one of the significant 'voids' in nineteenth and twentieth century Quaker history to which Ingle drew attention in 1997.⁵³

My study examines one woman's participation in international humanitarian relief with the intention of adding to this emerging cumulative picture of female humanitarian activism in this period. In addition to narrating her activities in the field in Austria and Spain, and her related popular educational humanitarian activities in Britain, I also explore her motivation in undertaking this work, and the role that her social and cultural capital played in her sense of agency and her ability to make a difference. One area of interest, for example, is the extent to which her background as a 'birthright' member of the tightly-knit Society of Friends, the 'peculiar people' whose own early experiences and long term memory of persecution is often assumed to result in a particular or ingrained affinity with the oppressed, is a factor in her activism. This very particular cultural and religious background, her own religious beliefs, and her

⁵² Greenwood, *Friends and Relief*, p 194

⁵³ Sandra Stanley Holton, *Quaker Women: Personal Life, Memory and Radicalism in the Lives of Women Friends, 1780-1930* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007); Farah Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief Work in the Spanish Civil War* (New York & Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002); Storr, *Excluded from the Record*; H. Larry Ingle, "The Future of Quaker History", *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, 58, no. 1 (1997) 1-16, pp 10-11

membership of the Society of Friends is one of a number of areas rife with contradictions, ambiguities and archival silences, all of which influence our understanding of her life history.

Sources, Silences and Ambiguities

This study is based on two main bodies of source material - Francesca's own prolific writings in the form of published books and journalism, and archival collections from a range of institutions and private collections. A list of her published books, pamphlets, and selected journalism is given in the bibliography, although as this study concentrates on her humanitarian activism in the interwar period I inevitably privilege some of her texts over others, and particular chapters draw specifically on a critical reading of those that relate to that episode of activism.

As with any other historical texts, Francesca's autobiographical accounts and other writings need to be located within the social and political contexts of their production. As Ellis remarked: 'Writing the lives of people who have already written their own is a tricky business', and conflicts can arise between the subject's 'authorised' version and that of the biographer.⁵⁴ Reading Francesca's autobiographical accounts against the archival sources throws up a number of questions and ambiguities. Influenced by poststructuralist theories on subjectivity we now recognise that the self is not a fixed, stable entity, and that identities are fluid constructions that change with time and circumstance. Rather than hide the multiple facets of an individual's subjectivity

⁵⁴ Ellis, *Literary Lives*, p 8

auto/biography adopts an alternative approach by featuring the complexities as a way of gaining a more rounded and nuanced understanding of the subject and her world. Considering her complex and changing views in their historical context will contribute to our knowledge of the culture in which she lived, and of the attitudes prevalent in society and among political and humanitarian activists at that time. As Stanley argued:

Conventional biography sees the rich complexity of a person's life as an embarrassment, a failure to find the real person who must be there if only you look deeply enough and do it 'properly'...Any feminist biography, indeed any good biography worthy of the name, should instead firmly grasp the cup of plenty that a person's life and their contemporaries' views of it represents: 'she was like that *and* like that' should be its motto.⁵⁵

Biographers and readers alike need to be aware of the element of personal mythology and reinvention included in any autobiography or oral history account. Weiler, reflecting on writing her history of women teachers through autobiographical texts, demonstrated that teachers' life narratives 'do not provide a transparent picture of past lives; each kind of evidence needs to be read for the context and conditions of its productions'.⁵⁶

This raises the questions implicit in both biography and autobiography about what constitutes the 'truth' and whose 'truth' is valid? In her biographical work on Margaret Haley, Rousmaniere emphasised the social and political context in which her subject's complex and often contradictory multiple identities were shaped. This involved developing a questioning and critical approach to

⁵⁵ Stanley, "Biography as Microscope or Kaleidoscope?", p 21, emphasis in the original

⁵⁶ Kathleen Weiler, "Reflections on writing a history of women teachers", in Weiler & Middleton, *Telling Women's Lives*, 43-59, p 48

reading a subject's own presentation of herself and subsequent hagiographical portraits by others.⁵⁷ A subject's representation of her self and her understanding of her life are often heavily influenced by images from contemporary literature and K.R. Goodman, for example, emphasised the importance of understanding the cultural context of the writing: 'To read an autobiography, one must know the fictions it engages. No more or less than men, women have fashioned the stories of their lives from the ready-made images at their disposal'.⁵⁸

Similarly Steedman in her work on McMillan recognised that individuals often make use of the symbolic or fictional models available to them. She concluded that autobiographical narratives are far more complex texts than they appear on first reading and that the motivation for their construction is often a good deal more than the telling of a simple life story:

To consider a life story in fictional terms is not to suggest that its subject told lies about herself...It is rather to propose that as well as the other things that they do with a life, people live through - and make public presentations of themselves by using - a society's fictional forms.⁵⁹

Steedman had to counter her subject's conscious attempt to control future presentation and interpretations of her as a pioneering prophet.

In her 2003 paper on *The Truth and Harriet Martineau: Interpreting a Life*, Weiner explored the difficulties caused by claims to truth in the analysis of a

⁵⁷ Kate Rousmaniere, "Where Haley Stood: Margaret Haley, teachers' work, and the problem of teacher identity", in Weiler & Middleton, *Telling Women's Lives*, 147-61, p 150

⁵⁸ Katherine R. Goodman, "Poetry and Truth, Elisa von der Reche's Sentimental Autobiography", in Personal Narratives Group, *Interpreting Women's Lives*, 118-28 p 118

⁵⁹ Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain*, p 251

life and how truths are 'socially and culturally constructed and maintained'.⁶⁰ Focusing on how Martineau functioned as both a 'subject of research' and an 'object of text', Weiner based her analysis on Martineau's autobiographical writings and her subsequent biographers' use of her texts. She found that notions of 'truths' about Martineau by her various biographers were heavily dependent on their own individual cultural and political loyalties and on the 'truth-regimes' about women prevalent in their time of writing. She also demonstrated how Martineau's *Autobiography* 'cannot be understood as a straight-forward, descriptive record of her life - but as a form of truth-production...a conscious and judicious production of linear narrative that is meant to give the appearance of truthfulness'.⁶¹ Weiner drew attention to the need to consider autobiography in particular, not as a witness statement, but as productions and reaffirmations of identity and argued that Martineau 'provides an example *par excellence*, of how truth regimes are created and regulated'.⁶² She identified five key elements which Martineau used to 'produce' herself - a strong sense of market, networking skills, a belief in a truth worth telling, the ability to tell it well and sound truthful, and control over information channels.

The issues discussed above inform my reading and use of Francesca's texts throughout this study but in chapter four in particular I focus on issues of her authorial voice and the construction of her autobiographical account of her activism in Spain. Similarly, I draw on a selection of her journalism in all three

⁶⁰ Gaby Weiner, "The Truth and Harriet Martineau: Interpreting a Life", paper presented in the symposium *Truth and Auto/biography*, annual conference of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, April 2003

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

substantive chapters but discuss particular elements in its construction and her use of reportage in more detail in chapters three and four. I return to the issue of privileging particular texts, her authorial voice, and the consequences for the telling of the story in the concluding chapter.

As an archivist I am concerned in my day-to-day working life with the construction, selection, preservation and interpretation of archival evidence of the past. In writing aspects of Francesca's life story therefore I consider how the documentary evidence for Francesca's life has been selected, preserved and presented, and how that process, examined alongside my own labour processes as a researcher, can in itself influence a telling of her story and an understanding of its significance. Several biographers have found the archive to be a contested space where arguments over the access to, and the ownership of, a life and its documentary remains are played out. The reason for this, as Steedman made clear, is the degree of authorial power conferred by the archive. She argued that this is an area in which the historian should be explicit about her role 'as narrator', and the nature of her representation and interpretation of the surviving sources:

The writer of any kind of historical narrative can always present herself as the invisible servant of archive material, as merely uncovering what already lies there, waiting to be told. It is as well that the reader of this current study is alerted to the fact that the historian is able in this way to appropriate to him - or herself the most massive authority as a story teller.⁶³

Archives have many silent spaces; a result of what Martin referred to as 'the

⁶³ Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain*, p 245

politics of historical survival'.⁶⁴ One device available to the biographer encountering a lack of primary sources is to articulate the fragmentary nature of the evidence. Writing of the difficulties of documenting the life of the first female and Maori headteacher in New Zealand Smith argued:

In historical inquiries it is often the case that large chunks of a life are missing, that what we find are fragments of a woman's life, small moments and glimpses that in themselves are fascinating. The finding of a woman in an archive or photograph becomes part of her story. Her presence is significant even though we may never be able to reconstruct anything further about her.⁶⁵

Rousmaniere emphasised the importance of a textual reading of the surviving sources that incorporates the silences. She used the silence of her subject Margaret Haley, an influential teacher activist working in a city with an active network of African-American women's clubs and educational movements, on race as an interpretative device to explore the complexities of her character and the development of her views about racial difference.⁶⁶

The difficulty of placing Francesca in the archive is due both to the lack of sources extant for some aspects of her life story, and their fragmentation. There is no one collection of personal papers such as diaries, letters and manuscript copies of her writings, and such papers as do survive have been scattered and allocated to a variety of repositories - the Nikolai Bachtin Papers at Birmingham University Library, the Cizek Papers at the National Arts

⁶⁴ Jane Martin, "The hope of biography: the historical recovery of women educator activists", *History of Education*, 32, no. 2 (2003) 219-32, p 224

⁶⁵ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "Connecting Pieces: finding the indigenous presence in the history of women's education", in Weiler & Middleton, *Telling Women's Lives*, 60-72, p 71

⁶⁶ Kate Rousmaniere, "White Silence: A Racial Biography of Margaret Haley", *Equity & Excellence in Education* (2001) 7-15, p 7; see also Kate Rousmaniere, "Where Haley Stood: Margaret Haley, teachers' work, and the problem of teacher identity", in Weiler & Middleton, *Telling Women's Lives*, pp 147-61

Education Archive, the Kathleen Courtney Papers at the Women's Library, the Bedford College Archive at the Royal Holloway, and the papers of Isaline Blew Horner at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Oriental Studies. In addition to these collections this study also draws heavily on the records of the Friends Emergency War Victims Relief Committee (FEWVRC), and later the Friends Service Council (FSC), held at the Friends Library in London. This study will consider the implications of this fragmentation on the narration of Francesca's life and on the historical silencing of her story. It is a theme which recurs throughout the study that follows, but chapter three in particular attempts to interrogate the archival silences surrounding her life in Birmingham.

'In different places we are different people'⁶⁷

This study is structured around the concept of 'place' - geographical, social, intellectual, political and archival - as an interpretative device. Running throughout Francesca's life is a concern with 'place' and being out of place. She spent the best part of her life constructing safe spaces for the 'displaced' - beginning with the Belgian and Serbian refugees of the First World War, and through subsequent conflicts and famines, in Vienna, Russia, Spain, and other European countries during and after the Second World War. My understanding of the centrality of place in Francesca's life and identity comes from my reading of her writings, and the signals found in her texts in which 'place' is a central motif. It is fundamental to the way in which she gives meaning and structure to the narrative of her own life story. Many of her published works are structured

⁶⁷ Iain Sinclair, *Edge of the Orison: In the Traces of John Clare's 'Journey out of Essex'* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005) p 79

around 'place' - they are descriptions of a specific location such as *Portraits and Sketches of Serbia* (1920) and *Yugoslavian Macedonia* (1930); they are geographically arranged as in *In the Margins of Chaos* (1944) and *Aftermath* (1947); they record responses to, and representations of, a place by travellers as in *Strange Island* (1955) and *Muscovy: Russia Through Foreign Eyes* (1970); or they demonstrate how the displaced adapt to their surroundings and contribute to their new home as in *They Came as Strangers* (1959).⁶⁸

All events happen somewhere, and all the life experiences that define, influence and change our sense of identity happen in a geographic location. Place and geography is increasingly used as a concept of study by scholars from a variety of disciplines and among those who have influenced my thinking in this study are Livingstone and his writings on geography in the history of science, McDowell on feminist geographies, Dean and Millar's 'exhibition in a book' considering a sense of place in art, Hill-Miller's study of Virginia Woolf's literary landscapes, and Janik and Veigl's *Wittgenstein in Vienna*.⁶⁹ Turning to historians of education then Rousmaniere's 'Being Margaret Haley' was the

⁶⁸ Francesca M. Wilson, *Portraits and Sketches of Serbia* (London: The Swarthmore Press Ltd., 1920); Francesca M. Wilson, *Yugoslavian Macedonia* (London: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1930); Francesca M. Wilson, *In the Margins of Chaos: Recollections of Relief Work in and between Three Wars* (London: John Murray, 1944); Francesca M. Wilson, *Aftermath: France, Austria, Germany, Yugoslavia 1945 and 1946* (West Drayton & New York: Penguin Books, 1947); Francesca M. Wilson, *Strange Island: Britain Through Foreign Eyes 1395-1940* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1955); Francesca M. Wilson, *They Came as Strangers: The Story of Refugees to Great Britain* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1959); Francesca M. Wilson, *Muscovy: Russia Through Foreign Eyes, 1553-1900*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1970)

⁶⁹ David N. Livingstone, *Putting Science in its Place: Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); David N. Livingstone & Charles W.J. Withers, eds., *Geographies and Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); Tacita Dean & Jeremy Millar, *Place* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2005); Katherine Hill-Miller, *From The Lighthouse To Monk's House: A Guide to Virginia Woolf's Literary Landscapes* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 2001). Allan S. Janik & Hans Veigl, *Wittgenstein in Vienna: A Biographical Excursion Through the City and its History* (Vienna: Springer Verlag, 1998)

most influential touchstone for this study.⁷⁰ In *Putting Science in its Place*, Livingstone proposed that considering the 'life geography' of a biographical subject can add substantially to our knowledge and understanding of that life. Arguing that because we define ourselves by the moral and social spaces from which we speak, 'morally and materially *where* we are matters a good deal in trying to figure out *who* we are', and that in an era which recognises the self as fractured and multiple, undertaking an analysis of how a subject develops as a different person in different sites can reveal new dimensions on a subject's sense of identity and self.⁷¹ Similarly Rousmaniere used Haley's relationship with the city of Chicago as an interpretive device, or 'a window to view her as a person'.⁷² In articulating her concept of a 'City Self' she demonstrated the crucial role that a subject's surroundings can play in shaping identity and in providing a space within which individuals recreate themselves. Drawing on her own autobiographical experiences of city life in New York alongside Haley's experiences in Chicago in 1903, she presented three life lessons that Haley learnt as a result of living in that particular site at that particular time, lessons which had a crucial impact on shaping her future life and political development. The city is therefore a formative space in the life geography of both Haley and Rousmaniere. By 'reading' a subject's interaction with her home or physical surroundings as a 'site' of knowledge, we can construct new biographical interpretations which significantly enhance our understanding of the subject.

⁷⁰ Kate Rousmaniere, "Being Margaret Haley, Chicago, 1903", *Paedagogica Historica*, 39, nos. 1 & 2 (2003) pp 5-18

⁷¹ Livingstone, *Putting Science in its Place*, pp 182-183, emphasis in the original

⁷² Rousmaniere, "Being Margaret Haley, Chicago, 1903", p 18

Following the lead given in Francesca's writings suggesting the significance of 'place' I consider how three particular places in the interwar period contributed to her sense of identity and self, the forging of particular ideas and beliefs, and to the trajectory of her life - Vienna, Birmingham, and Murcia. I could have selected others, countries rather than cities; a case could easily have been made for selecting Serbia, for which Francesca felt a particularly close affinity, or for Russia, which chronologically fits between Vienna and Birmingham, or for Germany after the Second World War, the period in which her writings articulate most clearly her theories of humanitarian relief. However, I chose to consider three cities. Vienna and Murcia were chosen because of the way in which Francesca herself wrote about their profound influence on her life, and this is illustrated in each chapter by the use of the quotations that provide the chapter and section headings. I selected Birmingham because it is the city in which I live and work, and the city in which I first discovered aspects of Francesca's story.⁷³ I also selected Birmingham because from the outset I instinctively felt that Francesca's relationship with the city was of a very different quality to her relationship with Vienna and Murcia and that therefore it would make an interesting counter case study for exploring why and how some places are more influential on one's sense of self and identity than others. I return to the implications of my selection, and how I revised my initial opinion of Birmingham as a 'non-place' in my concluding chapter.

Following 'in the footsteps' of one's subject has become a recognisable convention in literary biography, most closely associated with Holmes and his

⁷³ I am grateful to my supervisor Ian Grosvenor for drawing my attention to Francesca whom he first encountered whilst researching Ian Grosvenor *et al*, *The People's Century: Birmingham 1889-1999* (Birmingham: TURC Publishing Ltd., 1999)

conception of biography as pursuit:

Only, for me, it was to become a kind of pursuit, a tracking of the physical trail of someone's path through the past, a following of footsteps. You would never catch them; no, you would never quite catch them. But maybe, if you were lucky, you might write about the pursuit of that fleeting figure in such a way as to bring it alive in the present.⁷⁴

Similarly there has also been some discussion by historians of the need to visit the places and spaces associated with a subject's life or what Samuel referred to as the 'materiality of history' through the landscape.⁷⁵ In an article on the popularity of historical walks Davin described her attempt to 'develop a sense of "where" as well as "when" and "how"' in her research, and how the stirring of the imagination brought about by the associations of a building or walking the same streets can prompt understanding of the past and its relationship to the present by disrupting chronology and narratives.⁷⁶ The title of Davin's essay recalls another writer known for 'her delighted response to place', whose essays on biography and autobiography and experimentation with their forms, provide some of the most innovative developments in the theory of life writing in the first half of the twentieth century and are often credited with changing the genre.⁷⁷ Virginia Woolf was very aware of the importance of visiting the spaces of a life, and famously wrote that 'to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places', whilst also being aware that such visits have the potential to stray into the territory of 'sentimental

⁷⁴ Richard Holmes, *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986) p 27; see also Richard Holmes, *Sidetracks: Explorations of a Romantic Biographer* (London: Flamingo, 2001)

⁷⁵ Raphael Samuel, *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain. Theatres of Memory, Volume II* (London: Verso, 1998) p 351

⁷⁶ Anna Davin, "Standing on Virginia Woolf's Doorstep", *History Workshop Journal*, 31 (1991) pp 73-84

⁷⁷ Hill-Miller, *From The Lighthouse To Monk's House*, p 1

journeys'.⁷⁸ In her study of the geography of Woolf's writing, Hill-Miller demonstrated how such visits prompted new ideas and insights into a subject's life; that it was Woolf's appreciation of the consequences of the architecture and lack of piped water supply throughout 5 Cheyne Row, for example, which altered her interpretation of the Carlyles' marital difficulties.⁷⁹

As an archivist living and working in Birmingham I know that city and its history well. I wanted to explore whether following Francesca's footsteps to Vienna and Murcia, albeit in very different times and contexts, would add to my understanding of her activities in those particular cities, and the consequent effects they had on her. In the concluding chapter of this study I reflect upon my attempts to follow in Francesca's footsteps and explore whether the process contributed to my knowledge and understanding of Francesca's life and activities as a travelling activist. Francesca was in Vienna and Murcia at times of great historical turmoil; in Vienna in the aftermath of defeat in a catastrophic war, and in Murcia during a violent and painful civil war the memory of which continues to reverberate in contemporary Spanish life. Although far from being a central theme of this study, recent work in the fields of memory, history, and the landscapes of war, was helpful in considering whether any physical trace of Francesca could be found in the landscapes of both cities, and how the existence or absence of that trace, and the city as a space of 'contested memory', might inform my study. In particular I found the ideas on the relationships between cityscapes and the politics of memory and commemoration in Walkowitz and Knauer's edited collection of essays *Memory*

⁷⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), and "Haworth, November, 1904", quoted in Hill-Miller, *From The Lighthouse To Monk's House*, p 1

⁷⁹ Hill-Miller, *From The Lighthouse To Monk's House*, p 4

and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space a useful prompt, as was Ladd's *The Ghosts of Berlin*.⁸⁰ From a biographical perspective in considering the physical, archival and memory traces of a woman activist in landscapes of war I found Pickles' *Transnational Outrage*, a study of the life, death and transnational geographical commemoration of Edith Cavell a stimulating study.⁸¹ Although Cavell obviously differed from Francesca and her relief worker colleagues in that in death Cavell was portrayed as a national icon signifying enemy atrocity, a highly gendered vision of woman in war, and ideas of British imperialism and identity, I found Pickles' study useful when considering issues of gender, war, the landscape, memory and identity in a transnational context.

Francesca's life story provides a site for revealing previously 'hidden internationalisms' that lie in the overlapping webs of connections which existed between progressive educationalists, political activists and international humanitarian relief networks. Despite the dearth of studies of international humanitarian relief, there is a growing body of work within the history of education and women's history on international activism and transnational connections and this study is informed by, and contributes to, this literature.⁸²

⁸⁰ Daniel J. Walkowitz & Lisa Maya Knauer, eds., *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004); Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); see also the essays in "Identity, Place, Landscape and Heritage", a special issue of *Journal of Material Culture*, 11, nos. 1 & 2 (2006)

⁸¹ Katie Pickles, *Transnational Outrage: The Death and Commemoration of Edith Cavell* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

⁸² On hidden internationalisms see: Anne Summers, "Gaps in the record: Hidden Internationalisms", *History Workshop Journal*, 52 (2001) pp 217-27; June Hannam, "International Dimensions of Women's Suffrage: 'at the crossroads of several interlocking identities'", *Women's History Review*, 14, nos. 3 & 4 (2005) pp 543-60; Anne Summers, "Which Women? What Europe? Josephine Butler and the International Abolitionist Federation", *History Workshop Journal*, 62 (2006) pp 214-31; Ian Grosvenor, "'The Art of Seeing': Promoting Design in Education in 1930s England", *Paedagogica Historica*, 41, nos. 4 & 5 (2005) pp 507-

No individual life can be told in isolation, and in addition to revealing 'lost internationalisms' the studies referred to above also focus on networks. Relationships and their meanings evolve with time and circumstances and the researcher's intellectual biography is key in the difficult task of determining the significance and quality of relationships. Again, auto/biography provides a helpful framework as it eschews the traditional biographical 'spotlight' on one particular subject in isolation, and locates the subject 'as a social self lodged within a network of others'.⁸³ In their 'biography' of Emily Wilding Davison, Stanley and Morley attempted to rescue Davison 'from the myths surrounding her memory' through the identification and analysis of her relationships. In finding that they had a subject who had left little personal or documentary evidence they took a different approach and sought to analyse her life by locating her 'within a web of friendship and comradeship'.⁸⁴ Their biography is consequently written as an account of the auto/biographical labour process involved in mapping the significant relationships of her life. By 'building up a mosaic of brief mentions and glimpsed presences' they tell the story of their construction of the collective biographies of six women 'comrades', rather than a conventional linear narrative.⁸⁵ Francesca's places were populated by the people she assisted and by her networks of contacts and friendships. She

34; Martin Lawn, "Reflecting the Passion: Mid-century Projects for Education", *History of Education*, 33, no. 3 (2004) pp 505-513; Martin Lawn, "Circulations and Exchanges: Emergence of Scientific Cosmopolitanism in Educational Research" (paper presented at the Congress of Historical Sciences, Sydney, 2005); Joyce Goodman, "Working for Change Across International Borders: the Association of Headmistresses and Education for International Citizenship", *Paedagogica Historica*, 43, no. 1 (2007) pp 165-80; Joyce Goodman, "Social Change and Secondary Schooling for Girls in the 'Long 1920s': European Engagements", *History of Education*, 36, nos. 4 & 5 (2007) pp 497-513

⁸³ Stanley, *The auto/biographical I*, pp 214, 221

⁸⁴ Ann Morley & Liz Stanley, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison* (London: Women's Press, 1988) p 96

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p 111; see also Liz Stanley, *Feminism and Friendship: two essays on Olive Schreiner*, *Studies in Sexual Politics* no. 8 (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1985) pp 7-8

moved in and out of a number of occasionally overlapping networks during the course of her activism and I consider how these affected the development of her ideas and her ability to act as an effective agent of change, the methodological issues they raise, and their implications for the telling of her story.

Structure of Study

This study is arranged in five chapters. The current chapter is followed by three substantive chapters focusing on a different city in turn - Vienna, Birmingham and Murcia. Each of these three chapters is organised in three parts. The first part comprises of a narrative of events relating to Francesca's life and activities in that city, the second part features a discussion of a particular methodological issue which came to the fore whilst researching and writing that chapter, whilst the third part analyses the significance of that particular place in the overall trajectory of Francesca's life and activism. In the final chapter I return to many of the issues raised in this introduction relating to auto/biography, the sources available, and authorial voice. I also reflect upon my own journey following in Francesca's footsteps, and how reading her life through the prism of 'place' has influenced my telling of her story. As she collaborated with a large number of individuals who move in and out of the story, occasionally changing names or titles, I provide a cast of supporting actors in appendix one to assist the reader, and this includes biographical information for individuals who appear in numerous places in the text. Where an individual appears only once or in a limited way then biographical information is provided in a footnote.

CHAPTER TWO

VIENNA: 'THE GREATEST INTELLECTUAL, AESTHETIC AND ROMANTIC STIMULUS OF MY LIFE'¹

The children who go to Professor Cizek make wonderful and daring things "out of their heads" and go on making them though they are not properly fed, and life has begun to press on them so early that they must be thinking of earning their own living before they have left school.²

This quotation comes from a pamphlet written by Francesca in Vienna in 1921 and published by the FSC as part of its attempts to raise awareness of post-war conditions in the city and lever funds for its relief work. As an extract it embodies two of her defining and interrelated activities in the city - her participation in child relief on behalf of the Friends and Save the Children Fund (SCF), and her engagement with the art educator Professor Franz Cizek and the creativity of his pupils.

This chapter is organised in three parts. The first part will narrate the story of Francesca's activities in Vienna between 1919 and 1922, working as part of Hilda Clark's Quaker relief team establishing food depots and engaging in middle class and academic relief, and her work bringing together the art of Cizek's students as a touring exhibition. The second part will address two of the methodological issues which came to light during this part of my research, firstly the use of exhibitions to promote and disseminate educational and humanitarian ideas, and secondly the impact of networks on her life and

¹ June Horder, ed. *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure* (London: privately published, 1993) p 108

² Francesca M. Wilson, *Vienna Handicrafts* (London: Friends Service Council, 1921)

activism and the issues involved in researching and writing this significant element of her story. Finally the chapter will conclude by seeking to unpack the claim made in the quotation that provides the title of this chapter, by exploring and evaluating the significance of Vienna as a place in Francesca's wider life story.

I - A 'city of the dead'³

In November 1919 Francesca was on her way back to Britain from Serbia where she had been engaged in relief work with displaced civilians and wounded soldiers. Whilst in Serbia she had heard of the great need in Vienna and of the work of the Vienna Quaker Mission and she decided to visit the city to see the work for herself. The Mission had originated in the concern of a number of humanitarian activists in Britain about the plight of malnourished children in the city. In June 1919, for example, the Quaker periodical *The Friend* carried the impressions of Dr. Ethel Williams of Newcastle, a former suffragist and an activist in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF):⁴

What I saw in Vienna was the destruction of a race. I knew the city thirty years ago, and except for the flowers that grow there, nothing is now the same. The whole population is listless and depressed, and the silent streets look desolate. No children play in them, and from the dilapidated houses plaster is falling. Though everyone is ill, it is the children and the old people who are suffering the worst. Scarcely any children under four years of age can walk, and all the poor children under that age are carried in their mother's arms... There is now no milk for children over a year old: no meat, fish or butter, and very often no sugar.⁵

³ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 106

⁴ Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage*, pp 41,45, 85

⁵ "The Famine in Central Europe & Eastern Europe", *The Friend*, 20 June 1919, p 396

A few weeks later in July 1919 Dr. Hilda Clark, the Quaker granddaughter of John Bright, visited Vienna and was horrified by what she found.⁶ At the outbreak of the First World War Clark had been instrumental in initiating the Friends' active response to civilian distress in Europe and had also been directly engaged in Quaker relief in France. Her subsequent reports to the Friends on post-war conditions in Vienna resulted in the establishment of the Quaker Mission in the city under her direction.⁷ She used *The Friend* to publicise conditions and recruit Quaker relief workers and in the issue of 15 August 1919 she appealed for 'more women workers' in particular, women who had both initiative and good German.⁸ Her appeals were successful and the Mission grew rapidly; by November 1920 it included between 50 and 60 British and American relief workers, many of them women.⁹

In Vienna the Quakers worked in close collaboration with the SCF which had originally been established to raise funds for existing relief organisations and much of their aid to the city was funded by the SCF.¹⁰ The SCF was formed out of the Fight the Famine Council (FFC), an organisation founded due to a concern about the worsening conditions in Central Europe and to campaign against the Allied Blockade, which held its first public meeting on 1st January

⁶ See appendix one p 321 for biographical details for Clark. See also Sandra Stanley Holton, "Clark, Hilda (1881-1955)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/38518> [Accessed 3 March 2005]; Fry, *A Quaker Adventure*, pp xv, 1-90; Margaret E. Hirst, *The Quakers in Peace and War: An Account of Their Peace Principles and Practice* (London: The Swarthmore Press Ltd., 1923) pp 497-8

⁷ Edith Mary Pye, ed., *War and its Aftermath: Letters from Hilda Clark, M.B., B.S. from France, Austria and the Near East 1914-1924*, ([London: Friends Book House, 1956]), pp 39-40

⁸ Hilda Clark, "Vienna", *The Friend*, 15 August 1919, p 510; for reports of conditions in Vienna see also *The Friend*, 15 August 1919, p 510 and Hilda Clark, "Friends Relief Work in Austria: The Scope of the Work", 28 November 1919, pp 723-4

⁹ Anna B. Thomas, "First Impressions of the Vienna Mission", *The Friend*, 5 November 1920, pp 709-10

¹⁰ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M1-3, minutes of the Austria and Hungary Sub-committee of the FEWVRC

1919 in Westminster Central Hall. The FFC was supported by a number of activists and intellectuals including the classicist Gilbert Murray and the historian J. L. Hammond (who later wrote the forward to Francesca's book *In the Margins of Chaos*).¹¹ Among its founders were the sisters Dorothy Buxton and Eglantyne Jebb, both of whom had an interest in international affairs and in the welfare of children. Like Francesca, Buxton was educated at Newnham College (1900-04) and in 1904 she married Charles Roden Buxton who shared her international interests and political outlook.¹² Jebb, whose biography would later be written by Francesca, was briefly a teacher and was subsequently involved in social research in Cambridge and a member of Cambridge Education Committee.¹³ At an FFC meeting on 15th April 1919 Dorothy Buxton, moved that a sub-committee be formed to establish a special relief fund for children in distress in Central Europe. This led to the formation of the SCF, which was formally launched at a public meeting in London's Albert Hall on 19th May. Initially its General Secretary, Buxton soon relinquished this role to Jebb, the woman whose name is most closely associated with the SCF

¹¹ Both men are listed as members of the Council and Economic Committee of the organisation respectively in an FFC publication in 1920 which forms part of a collection of FFC pamphlets at the BL, 8275.s.5. Also listed among others are Maud Royden, Dorothy and Charles Roden Buxton and Ethel and Phillip Snowden.

¹² Sybil Oldfield, "Buxton, Dorothy Frances (1881-1963)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/56643> [Accessed 3 March 2005]. In 1916-17 the Buxtons joined the Society of Friends and the ILP. During the war Dorothy Buxton had been active in disseminating information from the German and European press through her column in the *Cambridge Magazine*, including articles on the worsening conditions in Germany and Central Europe, many of which were translated by her sister, Eglantyne Jebb.

¹³ See Kathleen Freeman, *If Any Man Build: The History of the Save the Children Fund* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965) p 20; Edward Fuller, *The Right of the Child: A Chapter in Social History* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1951) pp 15-34; Francesca M. Wilson, *Rebel Daughter of a Country House: The Life of Eglantyne Jebb, Founder of the Save the Children Fund* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967), pp 17, 168; see also Linda Mahood, "Elementary Teaching as Toil: The Diary and Letters of Miss Eglantyne Jebb, a Gentlewoman Schoolmistress", *History of Education*, 35, no. 3 (2006) pp 321-343

and who led the organisation until her death in 1928.¹⁴

Like Williams and Clark before her Francesca was very struck by the defeated city that she found on her arrival in Vienna:

In that winter it seemed a city of the dead, a huge and silent mausoleum. It was not that one saw children dead in the street or death-carts piled with corpses as one saw in the Russian famine. Nothing so dramatic. Its wounds were hidden. The silence struck me. The streets were deserted, except for queues of people waiting for rations of wood and sour bread, all of them, women and children as well as men, huddled in old patched army coats: all of them pale, hungry, cold, silent and waiting. This was defeat: this was how a great Empire ends, not with a bang, not even it seemed with a whimper. Nothing here but hunger, cold and hopelessness.¹⁵

With her good German, years of relief experience, and ample reserves of initiative, Francesca was an ideal addition to Clark's team and the minutes of the meeting of the FEWVRC in London on 4th December 1919 record that they are glad to hear of her arrival in Vienna alongside two other experienced workers Edith Pye and Edward Backhouse.¹⁶ Francesca maintained that she only intended to stay for a few days, later writing that she 'little thought that this rather chance visit was to involve me in work for the next three years'.¹⁷ This statement is borne out by the FEWVRC minutes a week or so later which record an appeal by Clark for three workers to replace Blanche Chambers, Isabella Davy and Francesca, who could not remain in Vienna for much longer.¹⁸ Despite this Francesca stayed in Vienna for a period of three years

¹⁴ Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, p 174

¹⁵ Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, p 198

¹⁶ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M1, 4 Dec 1919

¹⁷ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 106

¹⁸ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M1, 11 Dec 1919. Her brother Maurice was due to marry her fellow relief worker Dorothy Brown in January 1920 and Francesca wished to return home for the wedding,

and after a short interval at home in Britain the FEWVRC minutes record her intention to return to Austria on 23rd February 1920.¹⁹

Whether it was her horror at the conditions she found, or a reluctance to remain at home in Britain, that persuaded her to change her mind is unclear. She would certainly have relished the opportunity to work with Clark who was well-known in relief circles and was exactly the sort of woman who appealed to Francesca. Hilda Clark was a strong and determined woman, whose sense of autonomy and single-mindedness occasionally led to tensions with the Friends in London.²⁰ Francesca admired her greatly, describing her in a letter to her brother and fellow relief worker, Maurice on 23 November 1919 as a 'daring woman'.²¹ Elsewhere she wrote of her as 'a woman with statesmanlike, imaginative ideas, selfless and completely dedicated to the task in hand'.²² Clark was quick to recognise talent and experience, and it is clear that Francesca relished the level of responsibility and autonomy that she was given:

Hilda Clark had the kind of humility (for want of a better word) that has a liberating effect. I mean by that, that being intellectually honest, capable of self-criticism and devoid of personal ambition, she was able to appreciate other people's gifts. Great opportunity was given in Vienna to workers to show their initiative. Many of us had positions of great responsibility. She was not afraid of delegating authority and because of this, much more was achieved and the work often expanded in

Vienna diary 1920, held in a private collection. I am grateful to Elizabeth June Horder for allowing me to access Francesca's diary for 1920.

¹⁹ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M2, 5 February 1920, records that J. Rowntree Gillett, Agnes Murray and Dr Marian Bullock were due to leave imminently, followed by Francesca and Fred Haslam on the 23 February.

²⁰ Greenwood, *Friends and Relief*, p 231. Greenwood records that Clark had 'caused much offence within the Quaker organisation by acting frequently on her own initiative...but without putting business through the general committee and its secretary, A. Ruth Fry'.

²¹ Quoted in Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 107

²² Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, p 199

unexpected directions. Talents were used, not stifled by autocracy or entangled in a bureaucratic machine. Not all could appreciate her - she seemed to many aloof, to others absent-minded, but she had shrewd judgement, the vagueness was superficial.²³

Indeed, as we will see, Clark could be said to share many of Francesca's own characteristics and under her leadership Francesca was given ample opportunity to develop her own work in Vienna in unexpected and innovative directions.

The Friends had been active in Vienna for several months by this time and had established a base in an apartment in a large former palace at 16 Singerstrasse, just behind the city's magnificent Stephansdom Cathedral. Conditions at Singerstrasse were far from comfortable for the relief workers. In Clark's correspondence with Edith Pye we get an impression of the bitter cold and the shortages of coal, food and rations which were a fact of daily life.²⁴ Francesca herself later recalled the 'maggots in the ship biscuits, kindly supplied us by the British Army' and the cold rooms of the former palace which had retained:

little of their former grandeur, except their size, their parquetted floors, their huge tiled stoves, festooned with Greek garlands and cold as tombs. Unheated it was more like a mausoleum than a palace.²⁵

Initially she was drawn into the daily activities of the mission. Writing in November 1919, at the time of Francesca's arrival in Vienna, Clark described the task of the Mission as 'to give the necessary food and clothing as a matter

²³ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 138-9

²⁴ Pye, *War and its Aftermath*, pp 41-2, 47

²⁵ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 106

of urgency to save the lives of the children who are dying in such large numbers, and to place the hospitals in a position to carry on their usual beneficent work'.²⁶ The American Hoover initiative was feeding over 100,000 school children in Vienna alone, but there was great need among children under five, the majority of whom were not eligible for this scheme.²⁷ One of the immediate problems faced by the Quaker workers was the lack of milk, a shortage which was imaginatively solved by the purchasing of 1,500 cows and bulls, mainly in Holland and Switzerland, which were given to farmers in the agricultural hinterland of the city along with fodder to ensure the milk yield.²⁸ This initiative developed into a structured programme of agricultural relief under the leadership of one of the early relief workers Helen Andrews, Francesca's room-mate.²⁹ Ensuring a chain of supply and a long-term solution to a problem was characteristic of the Quaker attitude, it formed part of a broader interest in agricultural relief and land settlement in Austria, designed to encourage self-help rather than simply provide an immediate but short-lived solution to a problem through an injection of charity. Francesca wrote approvingly of this approach and indeed it was the attitude that she herself adopted, both in Vienna and in her later relief work:

So much relief is the pouring of water into a sieve: hundreds of thousands of pounds are spent and the people left when the money is exhausted, demoralised by charity, but otherwise in the same state as they were before. Aid to agriculture is constructive and ought to be given wherever

²⁶ Hilda Clark, "Friends Relief Work in Austria: The Scope of the Work", *The Friend*, 28 November 1919, pp 723-4

²⁷ On Hoover and relief see Dominique Marshall, "Children's Rights and Children's Action in International Relief and Domestic Welfare: The Work of Herbert Hoover Between 1914 and 1950", *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 1, no. 3 (2008) pp 351-88

²⁸ Pye, *War and its Aftermath*, p 40; Greenwood, *Friends and Relief*, p 227; Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 109

²⁹ Vienna diary, 20 April 1920

possible, though of course emergency relief has to be done as well.³⁰

However, it was in organising emergency relief that a good deal of Francesca's time was spent initially, establishing the first of what became a network of food depots in the city. The first depot opened in December 1919 in the 19th bezirk (district) of Döbling and she subsequently assisted with the task of rolling out the initiative to other districts.³¹ The depots scheme was put in place following research undertaken by the city's existing network of Infant Welfare Centres, continuing the Friends' tradition of responding to known need and working in close collaboration with existing welfare services and local workers who were familiar with the situation. The Infant Welfare Centres' research examined over 200,000 children and revealed that 46.7% (96,752 children) were 'extremely undernourished' and 50% (103,573) were 'undernourished' to some degree.³² The Mission piloted a scheme at two centres where cocoa, condensed milk and butter were sold to mothers at prices below the current market rate, again based on the Quaker philosophy that paying a small amount for relief where possible maintained an element of self-respect for those in receipt of aid, and made for a more equitable relationship with the relief workers. Francesca described this philosophy as designed to avoid 'the taint of charity' and she wrote about the issue in some detail in her later pamphlets on refugees and relief in the 1940s.³³ As they could not assist every child in the city the Friends decided to prioritise those mothers and families who attended the existing Infant Welfare Centres, and aimed to establish a depot in each of the 21 districts, connected to the Centres where food could be sold and clothing

³⁰ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 109

³¹ *Ibid.*, p 119

³² Fry, *A Quaker Adventure*, p 202

³³ Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, p 200

distributed. The work of the depots was described in articles in *The Friend*.³⁴ They introduced a system of cards that were issued to mothers attending the Welfare Centres which were then exchanged for purchases at the depots. In cases of extreme poverty the Centre doctor could recommend free supplies. Similarly if the doctor recorded a particularly under nourished child then the standard supplies were supplemented with extra butter and other foods. Each depot was organised initially by a member of the Friends Mission in collaboration with the local Infant Welfare Centre and its medical staff. The depot was then supported by a local women's committee who co-ordinated the Viennese women volunteer workers who worked in the depots and the schoolgirls who undertook the packing of all the rations (see figure 4). By 30th March 1920 18 depots had been established where 18,000 children were receiving a weekly ration of two tins of condensed milk, a quarter pound of sugar, a quarter pound of fat or butter, half a pound of oatmeal or semolina, ten 'decagrams (about 3 ozs)' of cocoa, and a quarter pound of soap. The 'caloric value' of the supplies is given as 4,770 and the cost at the time of writing in 1920 was 3.22 Swiss francs without the soap. Only one child per family could receive the rations but additional dried vegetables and rice were distributed to families with more than two children. *The Friend* went on to state that three more depots would be opened by 14th April.³⁵ A new depot could open only if it had a month's guaranteed supplies.³⁶ Francesca recorded that by January

³⁴ For a description of the Quaker scheme see "How Help is brought to the Little Children of Vienna", *The Friend*, 27 February 1920, p 127; see also Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 111, 119-20

³⁵ "Friends and International Service: What Friends are Doing in Vienna", *The Friend*, 7 May 1920, p 273

³⁶ "How Help is brought to the Little Children of Vienna", *The Friend*, 27 February 1920, p 127

1921 more than 64,000 children received rations in this way.³⁷

In *Margins of Chaos* Francesca summarises the breadth of the Friends work into a manageable account for her readers through the device of recounting a 'lurid' tour that she gave two visitors, a bailie and a councillor from the Municipality of Glasgow, on 22nd March 1920.³⁸ Her intention in employing this authorial device was to give her audience 'a bird's-eye view of the situation at that time and what we were doing to cope with it' thereby rendering the massive extent of the problems and the misery of the city conceivable for her audience.³⁹ Her account of this one day displays elements of the tension that we see in some of her other texts between personalising problems to attract funding on the one hand and laying the recipients open to a voyeuristic gaze on the other. It was a tension of which she was well aware, and she commented that 'repulsive as it was to probe the misery of a conquered city, it was clear it had to be done thoroughly' due to the potential contribution that the visitors could make if convinced of the need.⁴⁰ Her visitors were initially sceptical and 'were all that Scotsmen should be - shrewd, reserved, hard-headed, not to be deceived by appearances or carried away by emotion'.⁴¹ Their day began with a visit to the University Kinderklinik where Margaret Hume, a friend of Francesca's from her university days at Newnham, and Dr. Harriet Chick were working with children suffering the after effects of extreme hunger. Both women had undertaken research work at the Lister Institute and

³⁷ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 120; Fry, *A Quaker Adventure*, p 201 also cites a figure of 64,000 children being assisted when the depots were at their height.

³⁸ Vienna diary, 22 March 1920. In her diary entry she states that: 'It was a lurid tour & as I have written a lurid description of it I need not go into details here'.

³⁹ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 109

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

were now applying the results in a very practical way in Vienna.⁴² Francesca and the two Glasgow officials were horrified by the ‘tiny dwarf babies’ but reassured that they recovered well when butter, cod liver oil and vitamins could be provided by the relief agencies, all clearly demonstrated with scientific charts showing the progress achieved if suitable supplies were available. Chick and Hume then accompanied the tour party to a dispensary in Mariahilf, where the lesson in the new science of countering rickets with vitamins continued, and Francesca was gratified to notice the bailie writing ‘cod liver oil for Mariahilf’ in his note book.⁴³

The tour continued with a visit to two of the Mission’s food depots in the city, beginning at Favoriten, one of the city’s poorest districts, where they also visited families in their tenement rooms. Francesca’s description of this part of the visit is characteristic of her writing style, peppered with literary references and juxtaposing the visitors’ appearance with those of the Viennese women and children to draw an effective portrait for her audience:

The tenements seemed like the circles of the Inferno. When at last we emerged we breathed deeply, thankful to have regained the Upper World, but unfortunately the car we drove up in had startled most of the inhabitants out of their dens and, walking through the courtyard, we began to be followed by children of all sizes and shapes and in every degree of squalor. The numbers increased as in a nightmare; gaunt women joined the crowd. The elder of the two Scotsmen was stout and

⁴² The Lister Institute of Preventative Medicine was founded in 1891. Eleanor Margaret Hume (1887-1968) studied at Newnham and subsequently worked at the Lister Institute, 1915-1959, researching nutritional disorders, particularly the benefits of vitamins A and D, see obituary in the *British Journal of Nutrition*, 24, no. 1 (1970) p 1. Harriet Chick (1875-1977) worked at the Lister Institute from 1905 and was sent to Vienna in 1919, initially with Elise Dalyell, and where they were joined by Hume. Whilst in Vienna they confirmed the use of cod liver oil for treating rickets, see H.M. Sinclair, “Chick, Dame Harriett (1875-1977)”, rev. David F. Smith, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30924> [Accessed 15 October 2009]

⁴³ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 110-11. It is not known whether the visit actually resulted in any additional resources for the relief work.

portly, with shining bald head, large red face and the traditional fair round belly with good capon lined. To surround him suddenly with troops of half-starved people seemed a jest out-Swifiting Swift.⁴⁴

After this insight into the life of the tenements the two men were so depressed and exhausted that they begged her to take them back to their hotel.

Although a significant part of the Mission's work related to the relief of children they also provided relief for the elderly and the academic and middle classes.⁴⁵

The Friends were concerned about the situation of university professors and their families, and of the students and 'dozents' (young lecturers with no stable salary) who 'were starving'.⁴⁶ Post-war inflation had left the widows and retired professors with barely enough pension to pay their rent. As early as February 1920 the Mission established a sub-committee to assist students and a 'Bureau' to co-ordinate middle class relief led by Lady Mary Murray, who became a member of the FEWVRC in March 1920 and organised an appeal in *The Manchester Guardian* that had raised £580 by December 1920.⁴⁷ In February 1920 her daughter Agnes Murray went out to work in the Vienna Mission co-ordinating the relief for the elderly and middle classes.⁴⁸ When Agnes left Vienna Francesca was pleased to inherit this work from her and found the retired academics to be 'delightful, abstracted, unworldly' and easily distracted from the 'crumbling of the society they knew' onto their specialist

⁴⁴ Ibid., p 112

⁴⁵ Jones, *Women in British Public Life*, pp 108-11

⁴⁶ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 136

⁴⁷ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M2, 19 February 1920, 18 March 1920, 23 December 1920, and 3 February 1921; Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 134. Lady Mary Henrietta Murray née Howard of Castle Howard, married Gilbert Murray in 1889. Mary Murray was later one of the founders of OXFAM. She died in 1956.

⁴⁸ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 134. FL, FEWVRC/AH/M1, 8 January 1920, records that Agnes Murray had been approved to go to Vienna. Fry in *A Quaker Adventure* records that Agnes Elizabeth Murray died in 1922.

subjects, leading to entertaining conversations and a trip to the Vienna Observatory to learn about the stars.⁴⁹ The younger 'dozents' visited Francesca in her office in the former imperial palace, the Hofburg, where she distracted them from their situation by indulging her curiosity and love of intellectual discussion, learning of among other things the Bantu language, Chinese pottery, the music of the Balkans, and Etruscan inscriptions.⁵⁰

The 'Professors' Action' was also tied into a network of Quaker academics and other sympathetic members of British Universities including H. Walford Davies of the University of Wales and G. Lowes Dickinson of Kings College, Cambridge, who were both present at a meeting of the FEWVRC in April 1920 where it was proposed that universities in Britain and Ireland should formally offer to assist the universities of Central Europe.⁵¹ Consequently, Francesca organised the removal of some 15 'Austrian men of learning' to Oxford and Cambridge colleges which had offered to host them. She selected suitable candidates and planned and organised their journey to Britain, accompanying them in the summer of 1922.⁵² The minutes of the FEWVRC record the receipt of a letter from a Miss Ireldale of warm appreciation for Francesca's work in University Relief, and stating that the balance of £900 left in her hands was to be administered by the Mission during the following winter.⁵³

Francesca was also responsible for beginning the Mission's Arts and Crafts

⁴⁹ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M2, 13 October 1921, Francesca was asked to take charge of the University Relief until the University Committee in London decided whether to send out another worker.

⁵⁰ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 136-7

⁵¹ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M2, 1 April 1920

⁵² Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 137

⁵³ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M2, 1 June 1922

Department, which assisted with the relief of the middle classes and which she described in a Friends publicity pamphlet to encourage donations:

The Friends have a department which they call "Arts and Crafts." It exists for the purpose of helping members of the middle class and the old aristocracy, by buying from them the things they make, and selling them in England.

It is a great pleasure to work in this department, because one comes in contact with the most refined and sensitive and charming people. They are all of them in need but it would be impossible to get at them or to help them in any other way. They are too proud to take alms, but they have a great deal of artistic feeling and considerable skill, and they are not ashamed of selling their work.⁵⁴

The Arts and Crafts sub-committee of the Vienna Mission was in existence by early April 1920 when the minutes of the FEWVRC record a request that Evelyn Sturge and Alice Clark, Hilda's sister, consider the sale of goods in Britain and the purchasing of materials to be sent to Vienna.⁵⁵ A sale at 190a Sloane Street, London, raised £202 in May 1921 and in the same period sales were held at Theydon Bois, Wolverhampton, Manchester, Oxford and Birmingham, the latter raising £101.⁵⁶ The minutes for November and December 1921 record several sales and 'large amounts of money involved' despite the difficulty of ensuring a supply of the most popular goods from Vienna.⁵⁷ The buyers of these goods were reminded of the higher purpose in purchasing artistic items:

⁵⁴ Wilson, *Vienna Handicrafts*, p 1

⁵⁵ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M2, 8 April 1920

⁵⁶ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M2, 8 July 1920, 12 May 1921, 26 May 1921, 14 July 1921. Francesca also intended to approach the directors of wholesale firms to ask whether they would be prepared to sell the items made in Vienna but it is not known if she was successful, FL, FEWVRC/AH/M2, 6 January 1921

⁵⁷ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M2, 24 November 1921, 1 December 1921

Former pupils of Cizek constantly come to me, bringing me some new kind of embroidery or some ingenious toy. These articles go to England also, and people who buy them can remember, if they like, that they are giving someone over here a heated room and a few proper meals.⁵⁸

The scale of the operation is evident in the minutes of the FEWVRC for April 1921, which received letters from both Edith Pye and Francesca testifying to the importance of the Arts and Crafts work as it employed about 1,000 people, mostly middle class Viennese women.⁵⁹

The Friends made full use of all available avenues to publicise their work and to sell goods. In addition to *Vienna Handicrafts* they also published Francesca's pamphlet *A Day in Vienna* in April 1920, and regularly sent the reports of the Mission workers to any newspapers that would use extracts.⁶⁰ Both the Friends and SCF had recognised the power of the photographic image early in their campaigning. The FEWVRC in London organised the taking of photographic images of malnourished children suffering from diseases such as rickets as part of their publicity drive and organised public lectures using lantern slides to illustrate the need and the benefits of the relief work undertaken.⁶¹ Whilst in Vienna Francesca became part of their early appreciation of the power of a new visual technology, the moving film image. The Mission was supplied with cine film to document its work, and Francesca

⁵⁸ Wilson, *Vienna Handicrafts*, p 3

⁵⁹ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M2, 21 April 1921

⁶⁰ No surviving copy of *A Day in Vienna* has been found but it was presumably similar to the reworked version of the Scottish visit that later appeared in *Margins of Chaos*.

⁶¹ FL FEWVRC/AH/M2 22 April 1920, 26 May 1921, 19 February 1920, 26 May 1921. Lectures were given for example at British Infant Welfare Centres. Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre Library, Birmingham, holds a copy of a lecture script illustrated with original photographs of children affected by malnutrition, medical examinations of children, the depots, etc. entitled *Vienna: A City in Darkness* written by Bernard Lawson, December 1920, and which is stamped 'Anglo-American Society of Friends Publicity Department'. Lawson was the treasurer of the Vienna Mission and was based at 16 Singerstrasse.

wrote the scripts for a 'propaganda film'.⁶² The title of the film is not given in her diary but it may have been one of two surviving films from this period made by the Friends to highlight their relief work in Europe; one from 1921 for which little information is available, and a further film from 1923 entitled *New Worlds for Old: Quaker Relief in Stricken Europe* which featured scenes of relief work in Vienna and was directed by George Hubert Wilkins.⁶³ They also made use of exhibitions to disseminate information about the conditions and to fundraise by selling the goods produced by the Arts and Crafts Department. Etchings and woodcuts were 'on view for sale' at the Rainbow Gallery in London, for example, in January 1921 and a few weeks later the Friends declined an offer from Kenneth Green of the European Art Publishing Society to sell work on a commission basis.⁶⁴ Similarly, the artist Sir William Rothenstein offered to co-ordinate an exhibition of work by himself and other artists which could then be sold for the benefit of professional classes in Vienna.⁶⁵ Francesca was also involved in facilitating negotiations between the Viennese artists, whom she met through Cizek, and the Medici Gallery, London, over the potential sale of artworks in Britain and the USA.⁶⁶ The Arts and Crafts Department was not Francesca's only, or indeed most significant, venture into artistic pursuits. As we have seen, Francesca found Vienna a bleak and conquered city when she first arrived in November 1919 but in later life she recalled her time there as

⁶² In her diary for 1920 Francesca uses the word 'propaganda' to describe the texts for a propaganda film (1 June) and for leaflets written in Vienna. She also records using visual propaganda in the form of photographs (4 May) and meetings addressed in Britain to publicise the work of the Friends and SCF, (e.g. 11-2 February).

⁶³ British Film Institute, Film and TV Database [online] <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title21912> and <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title21876> [Accessed 17 August 2009]. Francesca also appeared in a later film on Hungary made by the Friends in 1940.

⁶⁴ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M2, 27 January 1921, 24 February 1921

⁶⁵ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M2, 24 June 1920, 1 July 1920. This was a proposed joint initiative with the FFC.

⁶⁶ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M2, 24 February 1921, 3 March 1921

being 'full of colour and gaiety', a fact which she attributed to her interaction with Professor Franz Cizek, his pupils and the SCF exhibition.⁶⁷

The Friends and the SCF collaborated closely in providing relief to Vienna and there was considerable contact between the personnel of the two organisations in the city. It was through this collaboration that Francesca met Bertram Hawker who was closely connected to the Buxton and Jebb family through his marriage to Constance Victoria the sister of Charles Roden Buxton.⁶⁸ Hawker was interested in progressive education and in 1911 he had visited the Casa dei Bambine in Rome where he met Maria Montessori. Inspired by her methods he established the first Montessori school in England near his home at East Runton in Norfolk and also gave numerous lectures disseminating her methods in Britain.⁶⁹ For Francesca he was:

the kind of Englishman foreigners always hope to find - or did at one time - perfectly normal English gentleman, well-groomed, courteous, disciplined, reserved but with some odd kink in them, some quixotic eccentricity, that in time demolishes all their preconceived theories of what Anglo-Saxons are really like. Mr. Hawker's kink was educational reform.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, p 200

⁶⁸ Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, p 200. During his education at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, Hawker had developed an interest in the work of Toynbee Settlement and subsequently worked with the poor in London's East End, see obituary, *The Times*, 21 October 1952, p 8. He spent time in Australia where his father was at one point speaker of the Assembly in Adelaide, and where Bertram was appointed honorary chaplain to the Bishop of Adelaide in 1895. It was here that he met, and a year later married, Constance Victoria Buxton, daughter of Sir Thomas Buxton then Governor of South Australia and the sister of Charles Roden Buxton. The Hawkers returned to England where Bertram was ordained in 1900 and from 1908 they lived on the Buxton estate at Runton Old Hall in Norfolk. The biographical information on Hawker is taken from Dirk & Mary E.B. van Dissel, "Hawker, Bertram Robert (1868-1952)", in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* [online] (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996) <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A140470b.htm> [Accessed 03/07/2006]

⁶⁹ For more on Hawker's interest in Montessori and the reception of her ideas in Britain see Peter Cunningham, "The Montessori Phenomenon: Gender and Internationalism in early Twentieth-Century Innovation", in Mary Hilton & Pam Hirsch, eds., *Practical Visionaries: Women, Education and Social Progress* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2000) pp 203-20

⁷⁰ Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, pp 200-1

Hawker was also a committed internationalist and from the early 1920s he became involved in the development of the international student movement, believing it to be a mechanism for promoting peace and international understanding.⁷¹ His obituary summed him up thus:

In all this work, and indeed throughout his whole life, he shunned publicity and never accepted a salary or any financial reward or recognition. A nomad by nature, he was at home anywhere and loved foreign travel...His gentle attitude, his wonderful flair for seeing and creating beauty, and his unerring recognition of fine qualities in others, were an inspiration to all with whom he came into contact. An infectious zest for life coupled with an Irish sense of humour made him the most delightful companion to young and old.⁷²

One can easily see how these interests and qualities would have attracted Francesca. They also shared an interest in progressive education, Francesca later recalled her interest in the New Education movement in Austria at this time and on one occasion discussed its merits with Freud, whom she met at Singerstrasse but who was sceptical of her enthusiasm.⁷³ In her published texts she recalled that it was with Hawker that she was introduced to Cizek's Juvenile Art Class, an introduction that prompted the most enjoyable and creative of her Viennese activities.

Cizek was born on 12 June 1865 in Leitmeritz on the Elbe, then part of the Austrian Empire. The son of an art teacher he moved to Vienna in 1885 to study at the city's Academy of Fine Arts and later became a teacher himself at the Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Arts) where he became part of the movement known as the Vienna Secession, alongside his contemporaries Otto

⁷¹ Obituary, *The Times*, 21 October 1952, p 8

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 118

Wagner, Josef Olbrick, Josef Hohnman, Karl Moser and Gustav Klimt, many of whom shared his interest in children's drawings. In 1897 he established his Juvenile Art Class, and work by his pupils was subsequently exhibited side by side with work by the Secessionist artists. Francesca and Hawker were both entranced by Cizek and determined to disseminate his pedagogical practices. An insight into his methods can be gleaned from four publications written by Francesca and illustrated with examples of the children's work.⁷⁴ As we will see in the second part of this chapter, these publications, supplemented by a number of articles in journals, are key texts in illustrating Cizek's appeal to progressive educators in the interwar period and are the main evidential basis for his teaching methods until the publications of his colleague Dr. Wilhelm Viola in the 1930s and 1940s.⁷⁵ Francesca's publications draw the reader in to the world of Cizek and his pupils and employ authorial devices that can be seen in her other writings, such as the use of reported speech and conversations and vignettes from the children's life stories, alongside detailed descriptions of the activities of his class. One of the pamphlets, *A Class at Professor Cizek's: Subject - Autumn* is written as a case study and forms the basis of the following account of his methods.

⁷⁴ Three pamphlets and a book were produced: Francesca M. Wilson, *A Class at Professor Cizek's: Subject - Autumn* ([London]: Children's Art Exhibition Fund, 1921); Francesca M. Wilson, *A Lecture by Professor Cizek* ([London]: Children's Art Exhibition Fund, 1921); Francesca M. Wilson, *The Child As Artist: Some Conversations with Professor Cizek* ([London]: Children's Art Exhibition Fund, 1921); Francesca M. Wilson, *Christmas: pictures by children with an introduction by Edmund Dulac* (London & Vienna: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. & Richter & Zöllner, 1922). In addition to this Francesca and one of her American colleagues wrote numerous articles for publication in journals and magazines such as *Teacher's World* to publicise both the exhibition and Cizek's methods.

⁷⁵ Wilhelm Viola, *Child Art and Franz Cizek*, 2nd ed. (Vienna: Austrian Junior Red Cross, 1937); Wilhelm Viola, *Child Art*, 2nd ed. (London: University of London Press Ltd., 1942). Viola left Vienna for Britain in the 1930s. He joined the Society of Friends and by 1942 he was living in Birmingham. I have not been able to establish whether he and Francesca knew each other in Birmingham.

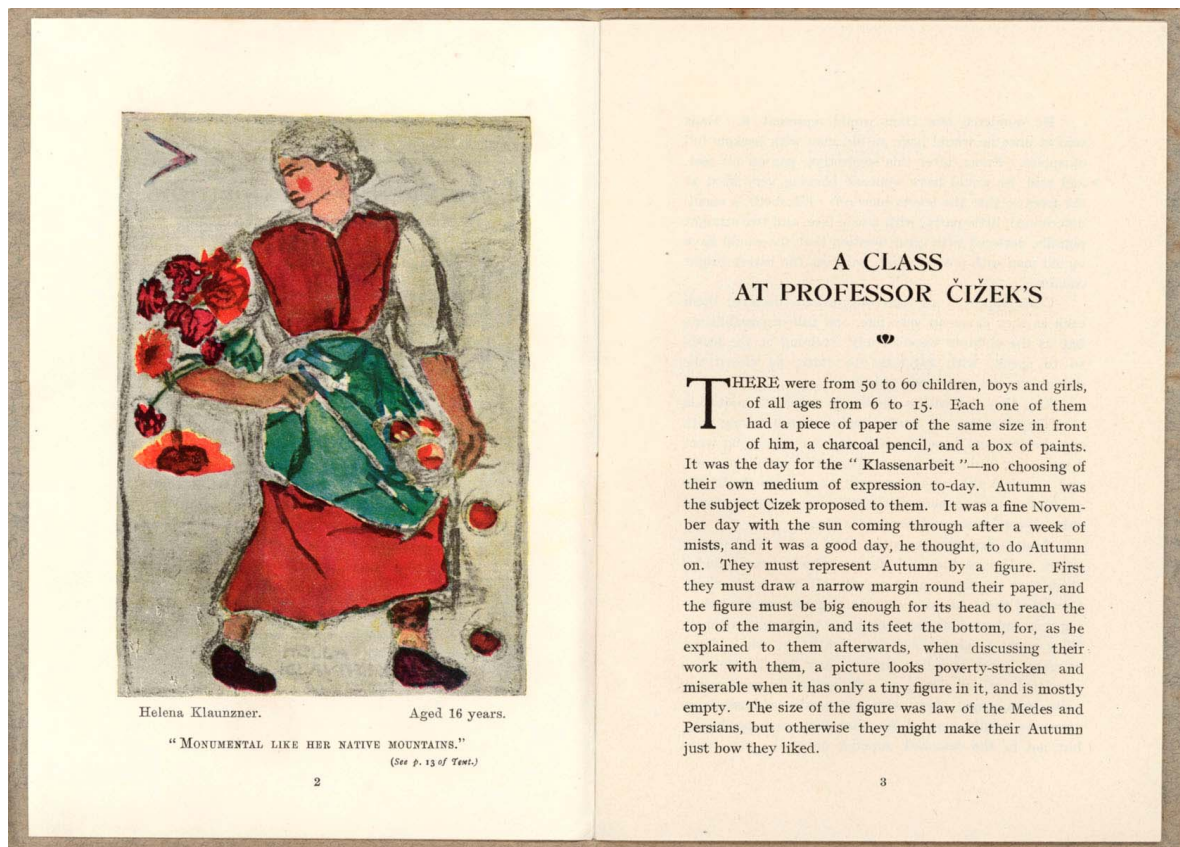


Figure 2: First page of *A Class at Professor Cizek's: Subject - Autumn*

The classes were held at weekends, for three hours on Saturday afternoons and two hours on Sundays, and were attended by 50 to 60 boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 15.⁷⁶ No fees were charged, the classes were voluntary, and the attendees were not selected according to artistic ability, Cizek maintained that all children were potential artists and left the class of their own accord if they had 'no joy in the work'.⁷⁷ For the most part the children chose their own subjects but once a fortnight a subject was allocated,

⁷⁶ Wilson, *A Class at Professor Cizek's*, p 3; Wilson, *The Child As Artist*, p 10

⁷⁷ Wilson, *The Child As Artist*, p 10. The lack of any selection is contradicted in an interview with the designer Ruth Kalmar Wilson, a pupil between 1926-30, who stated that although 'anyone could apply; hundreds did apply, and it was very difficult to get in...You had to submit work that he would look through, and, with Cizek's knowledge, he could see if there was potential there or not. If children had already begun to imitate work they had seen, he would not bother with them'. For an extract from the interview see Peter Smith, "Franz Cizek: The Patriarch", *Art Education*, 38, no. 2 (1985) pp 28-31

as in Francesca's case study where she describes the children's treatment of the subject 'Autumn' to be represented by a figure.⁷⁸ The children were given large sheets of paper and told to fill the available space, sketching the whole figure lightly before returning to complete the details. Other than this instruction they could interpret Autumn as they liked. Francesca invoked the atmosphere and intimacy of the class by personalising the account with descriptions of individual children: 'Elizabeth, a small, determined, little party, with a pale face, and two straight pigtails, declared with great decision that she would have an old man with pots of paint, painting the leaves bright colours'.⁷⁹

Francesca was surprised by the children's determination and lack of hesitation, a characteristic that she ascribed to the levels of 'self-confidence and courage' demonstrated by the artists as a result of the professor's gentle but constant encouragement. Once the paintings were complete they were collected and displayed on the wall whilst the children squatted around in a circle to discuss each work individually, the aspect of the class which was for the pupils 'the most thrilling part of the whole lesson'.⁸⁰ Cizek was 'lavish with his praise' without praising indiscriminately; he did not point out faults, but rather concentrated on understanding what the children had been seeking to express, stressing 'excellence of colour, conception and design'.⁸¹ Francesca closed her description of the lesson with an observation on the difficulty of capturing its essence in words; however, despite the fact that Cizek was 'evasive and cannot be quite written down' she felt that she had understood 'his secret':

⁷⁸ Wilson, *A Class at Professor Cizek's*, p 3; Wilson, *Christmas: pictures by children*, p 3

⁷⁹ Wilson, *A Class at Professor Cizek's*, p 4

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p 6

⁸¹ Wilson, *Christmas: pictures by children*, pp 3-4

He is not only intensely an artist, he is also a keen and incisive critic. But his criticisms have their root (as all true criticisms should have) in understanding and sympathy. He is gifted with a rare understanding and sympathy with the child mind. The only thing that finds lack of response from him is insincerity and artificiality. He is profoundly sincere himself, and he demands it of his children.

At the same time one feels, after seeing such a lesson, that there is no reason why there shouldn't be groups of happy children all over the world revealing the treasures of their hearts and minds with the aid of a little charcoal and paint. There is only one Cizek in the world, but there are a number of art teachers who have both sincere artistic sensibility and an understanding of children, and to these the work of Professor Cizek will be an encouragement and inspiration.⁸²

As we will see in the second part of this chapter Francesca's attempts went a long way to ensuring that Cizek was indeed cited as an inspiration for many leading art educators in the following decades.

Cizek is often heralded as a pioneer or father of 'child art', a term that he is credited with coining in the late 1890s.⁸³ However, he is a somewhat controversial figure and historians of art education have debated over the degree to which his pedagogical techniques promoted self-expression and agency in his pupils, and the apparent contradictions between his non-interventionist theories and the degree of artistic direction evident in his pupils' work, with critics pointing both to the similarities of content and the distinctive Cizek style displayed by the young artists.⁸⁴ Francesca's writings, and those

⁸² Wilson, *A Class at Professor Cizek's*, pp 15-16

⁸³ Donna Darling Kelly, *Uncovering the History of Children's Drawing and Art* (Westport: Praeger, 2004) p 82

⁸⁴ See among others: Richard Carline, *Draw They Must: A History of the Teaching and Examining of Art* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., 1968); Stuart Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (London: University of London Press Ltd., 1970); Bruce Holdsworth, "English Art Education between the wars", *Journal of Art and Design Education*, 3, no. 2 (1984) pp 161-179; Sue Malvern, "Inventing 'Child Art': Franz Cizek and Modernism", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 35, no. 3 (1995) pp 262-72; Smith, "Franz Cizek: The Patriarch", pp 28-31; Gordon Sutton, *Artisan or Artist: A History of the teaching of Art and Crafts in English Schools* (Oxford & London: Pergamon Press, 1967); Peter Smith, "Another

of others since, made much of his encouragement and development of self-expression, and this was one of the main attractions of his methods for progressive educationalists. In response to the question of how he obtained the 'delightful and original' from the children he is quoted as answering: 'I take off the lid, and other art masters clap the lid on - that is the only difference'.⁸⁵ When asked whether he pointed out mistakes of perspective, proportion and colour he replied that: 'Children have their own laws which they must obey. What right have grown-ups to interfere? People should draw as they feel'.⁸⁶

Cizek maintained that the object of the class was not to produce artists, but rather fully rounded individuals who could express their thoughts and feelings and whose lives would be enriched by art:

I like to think of Art colouring all departments of life rather than being a separate profession...My contribution is that I start with the children and make them begin to decorate the world they live in when they are no more than five or six. After fourteen, children as a rule lose their spontaneity and become ordinary. Until then their ideas grow like wild flowers in a wood - naïve, untrained, gaily-coloured. But after fourteen they become dull very often. They see too much, they grow sophisticated. I seldom keep them after fifteen. Then they go to other masters, where they learn technique and drawing from the life, and they become grand and copy other people's styles and they are no longer themselves - they are afraid of their own ideas.⁸⁷

In a further interview with Francesca published in *The Beacon* magazine, he elaborated on his desire to produce a generation of 'art-consumers', children who 'will be on familiar terms with art in the future and able to understand and

Vision of Progressivism: Marion Richardson's Triumph and Tragedy", *Studies in Art Education*, 37, no. 3 (1996) pp 170-183; Viola, *Child Art and Franz Cizek*; Viola, *Child Art*

⁸⁵ Wilson, *The Child As Artist*, p 3

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p 4

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 6-8

appreciate it as those unfamiliar will not'.⁸⁸

However, although she stressed his non-interventionist methods, Francesca did concede that Cizek had 'very definite theories, and is working on a well thought-out-system'.⁸⁹ He had no patience with copying the work of others and preferred the unsophisticated 'proletariat child' maintaining that richer children had been over influenced by adult art and external forces such as the theatre or cinema.⁹⁰ His ideas were originally rejected by teachers in Austria; in a lecture at Döbling on 'Education, considered as growth and self-fulfilment' which is reported by Francesca in one pamphlet, he recalled how teachers had ranged themselves against his idea 'to teach children Art by the simple method of not teaching at all in the accepted sense, but of letting the children teach themselves'.⁹¹ Echoing Rousseau he entreated the audience to: 'Make your schools into something else - make them into gardens - he implored, where flowers may grow as they grow in the garden of God. The teacher ought to learn to "hover like an invisible spirit" over his pupil, always ready to encourage, but never to press or force'.⁹² He believed that the child was at its most sincere between the ages of one and seven 'the age of purest art' when the child consisted almost entirely of 'Erbgut' (translated as 'heritage'), and was

⁸⁸ Francesca M. Wilson, 'An interview with Professor Cizek illustrated by his pupils', *The Beacon* ([1921]) pp 262-66, NAEA, FC/PL/1 D4

⁸⁹ Wilson, *Christmas: pictures by children*, p 3. This ambiguity about the level of direction given by Cizek is also reflected in an interview with Ruth Kalmar Wilson, see p 53 note 77 who maintained that teaching was 'minimal', 'indirect and subtle' but also confirms Francesca's account of certain rules that the children followed, see Smith, "Franz Cizek: The Patriarch", pp 28-31

⁹⁰ Wilson, *The Child As Artist*, p 10

⁹¹ Wilson, *A Lecture by Professor Cizek*, p 1

⁹² *Ibid.*, p 2; on Rousseau and Froebel and their influence on Cizek and on child art see Kelly, *Uncovering the History of Children's Drawing and Art*, pp 11-18, 27-34

motivated by the need to communicate and express inner feelings and ideas.⁹³ For Cizek child art was not a step on the developmental road to adult, and therefore better, art but 'a thing in itself, quite shut off and isolated, following its own laws and not the laws of the grown-up people'.⁹⁴

It is this respect for the art of the child as having an aesthetic value for its own sake rather than being as developmental stage towards the art of the adult that marks Cizek out from his contemporaries in art education. Although the idea had been introduced by the art educators Ablett and Cooke in the nineteenth century, it is Cizek who is credited with refining and popularising the arguments into an articulated theory of art education. His insistence on the child as a creative being expressing an innate truth sat well with the growing interest in 'primitive' and modernist art in the same period.⁹⁵ Kelly identified two historical paradigms of interest in child art - the 'window paradigm' of which Cizek is the leading proponent believing in an aesthetic appreciation for children's art, and the 'mirror paradigm' which is based in a scientific, psychological approach advocated by practitioners such as James Sully who saw the drawings of children not as 'art' but as a tool for the growing child study movement.⁹⁶ Despite Kelly's differentiation of two separate paradigms we see elements of both in Francesca's writings on Cizek. Although she concentrated in the main on the aesthetic value of the drawings she also reflected the early twentieth century interest in psychology, a popular movement which Thomson argued

⁹³ Wilson, *A Lecture by Professor Cizek*, p 4

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 5

⁹⁵ For the connections between child art and modernist artists see Jonathan Fineberg, *The Innocent Eye: Children's Art and the Modern Artist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997)

⁹⁶ Kelly, *Uncovering the History of Children's Drawing and Art*, pp 69-91

has been largely underestimated in this period, and its relationship to children's creativity.⁹⁷ It is undeniable that part of the attraction of Cizek's methods for Francesca and other educators and humanitarian activists was the potential to add to the growing discourse on the psychological study of the child. This contribution to the study of childhood would have been an attractive feature for the SCF; Jebb had an interest in 'scientific' methods and studies based on social surveys and data, Hawker as we have seen was a devotee of Montessori, and another supporter of Cizek and the SCF, Sir Michael Sadler wrote an article on 'The Science of Childhood' for the SCF periodical in 1922.⁹⁸

On the whole Francesca's selection of images to illustrate her pamphlets reflect her attraction to sentimental and romantic representations of childhood and of Austrian peasant life, and echo many of the romantic attitudes to Central and Eastern European cultures found in her texts.⁹⁹ However, in one pamphlet she touched upon the psychological interest of the work, and its reflection of the effect of war and its aftermath on the children, a subject that would become increasingly prominent during the Second World War. One of the children, Franz Probst, was noted for his 'uncanny skill in painting criminal and degraded types' and for painting violent and 'macabre' works depicting, for

⁹⁷ Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) pp 1-53

⁹⁸ Fuller, *The Right of the Child*, pp 70-86; Michael E. Sadler, "The Science of Childhood", *The World's Children* (1922) pp 134-7

⁹⁹ See for example Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*; Wilson, *Portraits and Sketches of Serbia*. Given that one of the aims was to 'revolutionise' the teaching of art, she presumably chose work by the most artistically accomplished children thereby ensuring the greatest potential impact, and there are suggestions from other visitors to the classes that her selection was not entirely representative of the work or in accordance with Cizek's own preferences. In an oral history interview late in life she stated that she consulted with Cizek on the selection of art for the exhibition. The whereabouts of the recording of the interview is not known but it is quoted in John C. Hancock, *Franz Cizek: A consideration of his philosophy, methods and results* (M.A. dissertation, City of Birmingham Polytechnic, 1984) p 73, a copy of which is held by the NAEA.

example, a skull with a dagger (see figure 3 for a drawing by Probst).

Francesca commented that scenes of 'himself as a grown-up soldier deserting the ranks, and another of skeletons under the sea with strange fish and sea creatures swimming round them, showed the sort of impressions that the war had made upon his mind'.¹⁰⁰



Figure 3: Image from *A Lecture by Professor Cizek*

Following Cizek's theories on the stages of child development, the pamphlets also included a number of references to the influence of differing age and social backgrounds on the child's creative development. In her piece in *The Beacon* Francesca wrote:

¹⁰⁰ Wilson, *A Lecture by Professor Cizek*, pp 9-10

He [Cizek] considers (as a co-citizen of Freud's, perhaps, should consider) that the class was of great value as a laboratory of psychological research. It afforded an unique opportunity for studying the effects of all sorts of influences on the child - sex, race, society, school, civilisation, etc. The results thus obtained he often made public by means of lectures and discussions.¹⁰¹

Cizek believed that there were three different types of children: 'First, those who grow from their own roots and are unaffected by outside influence; second, those who are affected by outside influences, but have strength enough to keep their individuality, third, those who, in consequence, lose their personality altogether'.¹⁰² One of the children cited as being of the first type was Bella Vichon, described as being from a very poor family but who later went on to study art in Sweden.¹⁰³ Francesca recorded that Bella kept 'an illustrated diary for many years - a thing the Professor encouraged all his pupils to do'.¹⁰⁴ Bella had ten such volumes which Francesca considered to be 'a very valuable record' of her development.¹⁰⁵ Some indication of the visual form of the diaries can be gleaned from illustrated correspondence that Bella sent to Francesca after she had returned to England. Francesca had developed close relationships with a number of the older girls, taking them with her to the opera or for walks in the forest, and this is born out by Bella's letters.¹⁰⁶ The letters are illustrated with colour and pen and ink drawings and recount her day-to-day activities in Vienna and later a course of study she undertook in Berlin.

¹⁰¹ Wilson, "An interview with Professor Cizek illustrated by his pupils", p 264

¹⁰² Wilson, *A Lecture by Professor Cizek*, p 6

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p 7

¹⁰⁶ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 128. NAEA, FC/PL/1 B2-6

However significant Francesca's publications are in documenting and popularising Cizek's practices they are only part of the story of Hawker and Francesca's attempts to disseminate his ideas whilst also raising money for child relief in Vienna. The publications were written to accompany an exhibition of the children's work arranged by Francesca at Hawker's instigation. Francesca selected the work for inclusion in the exhibition and co-ordinated the production of post cards and other reproductions of the children's work for sale (see figure 4). The exhibition opened on 18th November 1920 in the annex of the British Institute of Industrial Art in Knightsbridge where it remained on display until 2nd of December. The entrance fee was 1s. (except for the opening day when it cost 2s. 6d. until 6.00pm and 6d. in the evening), children were admitted for half price and special arrangements could be made for school parties.¹⁰⁷ It was advertised in *The Times* as organised by the Education Committee of the SCF and featuring artwork by children from Serbia, Vienna and elsewhere, although this is the only reference to it including work by children other than Cizek's pupils.¹⁰⁸ Following its London opening the exhibition toured the UK and Ireland. Demand was so great that it had to be divided into two and supplemented by 'fresh examples obtained from Vienna at a later date'.¹⁰⁹ Within two years it visited over 70 venues in 40 towns and cities including Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Hull, Bristol, Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Dublin and Belfast and

¹⁰⁷ *The Times*, 18 November 1920, p 10

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*; as Francesca had worked in Serbia before moving to Vienna and had close connections to Dr. Katherine MacPhail and her children's hospital in Serbia it is perfectly possible that the exhibition included work by Serbian children which has been overshadowed in the reviews by the attention given to Cizek and his pupils. For MacPhail see appendix one p 327

¹⁰⁹ Bertram Hawker, "Child Artistry from Vienna", *The Record of the Save the Children Fund*, 3, no. 1 (1922) pp 52-4

was estimated to have been seen by around 200,000 people.¹¹⁰



Figure 4: One of the post cards that accompanied the exhibition showing schoolgirls weighing out food in the Quaker depot, NAEA, FC/PL/1 F2

Whilst the exhibition was touring the UK Francesca remained with the Quaker Mission in Vienna before departing for Russia in 1922 to undertake famine relief. She maintained regular contact with Cizek, Hawker and the SCF and once her service in Russia was over she travelled with the exhibition to the USA. As we have seen there was a strong American presence in the Vienna Mission and Francesca collaborated with her friends and relief colleagues Dorothy North and Margaret Skinner to take the exhibition to New York.¹¹¹ It

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ For information on Dorothy North see appendix one p 328. Less is known about Skinner although she too was a relief worker in Vienna and visited Cizek's classes. The minutes of the Austria and Hungary Sub-committee of the FEWVRC record that Skinner joined the Arts and

opened at the Metropolitan Museum on 10th December 1923 accompanied by specially printed fundraising Christmas cards. A second version opened at the Art Centre New York on 20th December and in the new year the displays moved on to the Brooklyn Museum of Fine Art and Washington Irving High School.¹¹² Whilst in New York Francesca stayed at Greenwich House, a settlement house in Barrow Street, Greenwich Village.¹¹³ The Greenwich Settlement was known for its creative interests and it is no surprise that its workers were interested in the Cizek exhibition when it was shown in New York.¹¹⁴ Following its New York showings the exhibition embarked on a tour of US cities including Philadelphia, Chicago, Washington, Detroit, Denver Colorado, San Diego and Los Angeles and what was intended as a 14 month tour became almost four years.¹¹⁵ It also subsequently travelled to Canada and Australia.¹¹⁶

Despite her ongoing involvement with the exhibition tour, Francesca's time at the Vienna Mission came to an end in 1922 when she departed for Russia.¹¹⁷

Crafts Department in Vienna and would take Francesca's place when the latter left the Mission, FL, FEWVRC/AH/M2, 9 June 1921

¹¹² NAEA, FC/PL/1 E3, *Bulletin of the Art Centre New York*, December 1923, 115-120; Margaret Skinner, "Exhibition of the Work of Viennese Children", *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 18, no. 12, part 1 (1923) pp 280-1

¹¹³ NAEA, FC/PL/1 F2, post card dated 8 December. Francesca's contacts with the Greenwich Settlement probably came about as a result of the American Quaker workers in Vienna, a number of whom were ex-settlement workers including Dorothy North and Dorothy Detzer.

¹¹⁴ Founded by Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch and others in 1902 the settlement was heavily involved in social service for the largely Italian local population and in the provision of educational and cultural programmes. Simkhovitch, who was the Settlement's director until 1946, believed that the arts were essential to human life and self-expression and by the time Francesca stayed there it offered music, theatre, and fine arts programmes on site and had also established art classes in many local schools supported financially by the philanthropist Mrs Payne Whitney founder of the Whitney Museum, *Guide to the Greenwich House Records*, [online] <http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/tamwag/greenwich.html> [Accessed 10 September 2007]

¹¹⁵ NAEA, FC/PL/1 E6, Western Association of Art Museum Directors, *The Cizek Exhibition: work of children in creative art from Vienna Austria*, 1925, exhibition catalogue

¹¹⁶ Fuller, *The Right of the Child*, p 101

¹¹⁷ For an account of her work in Russia see Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 140-69

However, she kept in touch with Cizek, visiting him for the last time in 1933, some five years before his school was closed by the Germans in 1938. In December 1946 she received a notice of his death from the Vienna Jugendkunstklasse.¹¹⁸ By the time he died his name had become synonymous with children's art for progressive educators in Europe, North America, and Australia, and the focus of this chapter will now shift to consider the part Francesca's exhibition played in this recognition.

II - A 'new world'¹¹⁹

Mr. Hawker...recognised at once that Cizek was making an important experiment. He believed that if he could get an exhibition of the works of his children touring round England, he could kill two birds with one stone - raise funds for Vienna, and revolutionise art teaching in Great Britain.¹²⁰

As this quotation illustrates, Hawker and Francesca had two intertwined motivations for organising the exhibition from the outset. They saw it as a means for making both an educational intervention in the teaching of art by disseminating Cizek's pedagogical methods and ensuring the financial future of his Juvenile Art Class. At the same time they foresaw the potential of the exhibition as vehicle for making a humanitarian and political intervention, raising public awareness and funds for child relief in Vienna.

This part of the chapter will evaluate the exhibition as an innovative means of fulfilling these two intertwined objectives. Firstly it will consider the exhibition as

¹¹⁸ NAEA, FC/PL/1 E7

¹¹⁹ The full quote reads: 'Anyone who goes to these children with his senses awake and his mind and heart open knows that he has not just gone to one of a hundred exhibitions of art: he has entered a new world', Wilson, "Professor Cizek's Children", p 95

¹²⁰ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 124

an educational intervention that influenced the teaching of art in Britain and the USA and a humanitarian intervention in child relief in post-First World War Vienna. It will evaluate the success, or otherwise, of the exhibition in meeting its organisers' aims and consider its existence as an early example of a practice that became increasingly common during the twentieth century - the exhibiting of the art of children at risk from the effects of war by activists and non-governmental aid agencies as a mechanism for raising public awareness and financial support for issues of child protection. Secondly, it will explore the network of activists that supported the exhibition, and some of the methodological issues involved in mapping, researching and understanding the web of connections between a group of individuals which at first sight appears very disparate. The chapter draws on recent work that has identified exhibitions and their role in disseminating educational ideas and practice, particularly in the field of art education, as a productive but largely untapped field of study for historians of education.¹²¹ Following on from the work of Fuchs, Grosvenor, and White this part of the chapter seeks to demonstrate that exhibitions were also used as political and humanitarian interventions.

As a pedagogical intervention influencing the theories and practices of art education the exhibition was undoubtedly a success, and it is in this context that it appears in the historiographical literature. Although the first British showing of the work of Cizek's pupils was in 1908 at an international congress

¹²¹ Eckhardt Fuchs, "Educational Sciences, Morality and Politics: International Educational Congresses in the Early Twentieth Century", *Paedagogica Historica*, 40, nos. 5 & 6 (2004) pp 757-84; Grosvenor, "The Art of Seeing"; Ian Grosvenor, "Pleasing to the Eye and at the Same Time Useful in Purpose": a historical exploration of educational exhibitions", in Martin Lawn & Ian Grosvenor, eds., *Materialities of Schooling: Design-Technology-Objects-Routines* (Oxford: Symposium Books, 2005) pp 163-76; Margaret H. White, "Exhibiting Practices: paper as a site of communication and contested practice", in Lawn & Grosvenor, *Materialities of Schooling*, pp 177-99

on the teaching of art in London, it was the 1920 exhibition that prompted what Macdonald has referred to as his 'rise to world fame' as a 'pioneer' of child art.¹²² Another art historian, Carline, maintains that although Cizek's theories were not new, being similar in their roots to those put forward by Ebenezer Cooke and T.R. Ablett, founder of the Royal Drawing Society and organiser of the first child art exhibition held in Britain in 1890, the enthusiastic reception of Cizek's ideas was due to the exhibition and Francesca's associated pamphlets, which were followed in the 1930s by the publications of his former colleague Wilhelm Viola.¹²³ Carline argued that the exhibition: 'made an immediate impact on the general public, which was amazed at the fresh spontaneity of the paintings and the childish pleasure shown in creating something for its own sake'.¹²⁴ Similarly Tomlinson emphasised the importance of exhibitions of Cizek's pupils work for creating 'converts' to his methods and introducing new methods in teaching art.¹²⁵ Indeed one Austrian art educator maintained that in the interwar period Cizek and his theories were far better known and respected in Britain and America than in Austria.¹²⁶ Cizek himself valued Francesca's efforts to disseminate his theories, in a note written to her in German in June 1922 he stated that he was dedicating his book on papercuts and 'glued-on-pictures' (Klebearbeiten) to her in grateful remembrance of her

¹²² Jonathan Fineberg, *When We Were Young: New perspectives on the Art of the Child* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2006) pp 215-6; Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, p 342. On the success of the exhibition in disseminating Cizek's ideas see also R. R. Tomlinson, *Children As Artists* (London: The King Penguin Books, 1947) pp 20-1; Carline, *Draw They Must*, pp 157-73; Sue Malvern, "The Ends of Innocence: modern art and modern children", *Art History*, 23, (2000) 627-32 pp 627-8

¹²³ Carline, *Draw They Must*, pp 157-73

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p 164

¹²⁵ Tomlinson, *Children As Artists*, pp 20-1

¹²⁶ Albert Grüber, "How I Teach Art - And Why", *The New Era* (February 1936) p 33

active interest in child art and its encouragement in English-speaking countries.¹²⁷

The artist Edmund Dulac provided an early appreciation of the exhibition in *The Times* in December which concentrated exclusively on the artistic and educational aspects, making no mention of the humanitarian motives despite the fact that Dulac himself was no stranger to using art to raise money and awareness for humanitarian causes.¹²⁸ Regretting that in his opinion the exhibition had not received the critical attention it deserved he went on to state that the child artists had been ‘trained by entirely new methods’ and echoed Francesca’s comments on the psychological significance of the work:

The results achieved are so astonishing that I should urge artists, teachers, and the public in general to pay it a visit; they will rarely find such an occasion to derive so much benefit from an art exhibition.

The artist, if he [sic] belongs to the so-called advanced school, will discover that expression and character can be realized [sic] to an astonishing degree by mere children, free from sophistication or desire to impress, and without the prejudice of ugly colour and meaningless composition. The reactionary, if he is sincere, will curse the years of toil at school or academy. The teacher will find that art training can safely be considered a branch of mind-training as important as cricket, and be made to provide him with a key to the psychology of his pupils that nothing else gives him.¹²⁹

Indeed, Dulac was so impressed with the work that he went on to write the introduction to Wilson’s book of the children’s drawings of Christmas.¹³⁰ In his introduction he returned to some of the themes suggested in *The Times* review

¹²⁷ NAEA, FC/PL/1 B1

¹²⁸ *The Times*, 10 December 1920, p 6. Dulac produced a picture book of fairy tales sold to raise funds for the French Red Cross during the war, Edmund Dulac, *Edmund Dulac’s picture book for the French Red Cross* (London, New York and Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton for *The Daily Telegraph*, ([1915]).

¹²⁹ *The Times*, 10 December 1920, p 6

¹³⁰ Wilson, *Christmas: pictures by children*, pp 1-2

quoted above; that it was time to spurn the 'superstition' that 'efficiency in drawing and painting is the privilege of a few adults' only achieved 'after a long and arduous struggle' with artistic training, before going on to elaborate on the importance of memory and the psychological potential of child art which 'opens a door upon the unexplored and slightly disturbing processes of the human mind'.¹³¹

A number of child-centred art educators who came to prominence in the interwar period recalled the exhibition's significance and it was frequently shown at educational establishments and progressive education conferences such as the New Education Fellowship conference in Stratford in 1921.¹³² Marion Richardson, who had staged her own influential child art exhibition with Roger Fry at the Omega Workshops in London in 1919 and who referred in her autobiography to Cizek as 'that great pioneer of enlightened art teaching', was prompted to visit his class in Vienna on her way back from Russia in 1926 after having seen his children's drawings in the SCF exhibition.¹³³ Robin Tanner, who taught until 1935 when he became a school inspector, recalled that he was greatly moved by Francesca's pamphlet *The Child as Artist*, and finally saw the exhibition in 1924. He was inspired by the knowledge that 'there were already pockets of enlightened experiment where, often in conditions as unfavourable as ours, children were beginning to come into their own'.¹³⁴ Basil Rocke, who from 1946 was Senior Art Adviser for the West Riding, decided to

¹³¹ Ibid., p 1

¹³² IoE Archives, WEF/295, conference report by Violet M. Potter M.A., *The New Era*, Vols. I & II, pp 243-4

¹³³ Marion Richardson, *Art and the Child*, (London: University of London Press, 1948) p 51

¹³⁴ Robin Tanner, *Double Harness*, 2nd ed. (London: Impact Books, 1990) pp 37-8. However, on showing the Viennese children's work to his own pupils, he discovered that unfortunately they 'were far less excited by them' than he was.

teach art after reading an article in *The New Era* in the mid 1920s and spent two years in Vienna between 1929-31 where he met Cizek and Viola and visited the Juvenile Art Class.¹³⁵ Richardson and Rocke were not the only art educators to undertake a pilgrimage to Cizek's classes as a result of his growing fame, and these visits were a key factor in the spread of his educational ideas. Viola referred to the 'thousands' of Americans who visited the class and this is borne out by a former pupil who recalled 'oceans of foreign people, like Americans, who came and sat in on classes and went and talked to students, and made notes and so forth'.¹³⁶ A number of both American and British educationalists record undertaking such a visit; Marian Skinner who promoted the exhibition in the USA had visited, K. Doubleday who taught art at King Alfred School studied under Cizek, and Beatrice Ensor described a 'delightful morning' at his studio where a promise to contribute an article for *The New Era* was duly extracted from the professor.¹³⁷

Much of this response was due to the timeliness of the exhibition. Social, educational and artistic developments had ensured that, in the words of Marion Richardson, 'the times were ripe, the teachers' minds were ready, chiefly because of the growing respect for the individuality of the child'.¹³⁸ Malvern has argued that it is 'difficult to overestimate' the interest in child art in turn of

¹³⁵ Rosemary Devonald, ed., *Basil Rocke: Artist and Teacher* (Bristol: Redcliffe Press Ltd., 1989) pp 9, 31-33, 41-43

¹³⁶ Interview with Ruth Kalmar Wilson quoted in Smith, "Franz Cizek: The Patriarch", pp 28-31

¹³⁷ Viola, *Child Art*, p 105; IoE Archives, DC/WEF/VII/296 K. Doubleday, "Some Notes on the Cizek Method", *The New Era* (July 1922) pp 74-5; "The Outlook Tower", *The New Era* (January 1922) pp 2-3. In the same issue as Doubleday's piece Ensor's co-editor A.S. Neil described hearing Cizek lecture in Salzburg the previous summer, see "The Outlook Tower", *The New Era* (July 1922) pp 65

¹³⁸ Richardson, *Art and the Child*, p 59

the twentieth century Europe and America.¹³⁹ Spurred by the writings of nineteenth century art educators and psychologists such as Ricci and Sully, and the interest of modernist artists such as Klee and Kandinsky in primitive art and in children's drawings, the growth of interest in child art was linked to the well-documented rise of the child study movement and changing ideas of childhood in the same period.¹⁴⁰ After the disillusion of the First World War the association of the innocence of children and the 'authenticity' of their art with post war renewal ensured that art and creativity become central to the development of progressive educational ideas.¹⁴¹ There was great dissatisfaction among progressive educators with the existing methods of teaching art heavily dependent on copying and technical skill, described by Tomlinson as 'depressingly lacking in imagination and understanding', and a succession of 'soul-destroying and sterile methods'.¹⁴² Consequently the period from the 1880s to the First World War saw an increasing occurrence of exhibitions of children's art; the first recorded exhibition of children's art appeared in Philadelphia in 1876 closely followed by the first British exhibition in 1890, the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and the Das Kind als Künstler exhibition in Hamburg in 1898.¹⁴³ An advertisement for Francesca's exhibition in the *Burlington Magazine* emphasised its appeal to those interested in children's art and art education and the SCF undoubtedly capitalised on this

¹³⁹ Malvern, "The Ends of Innocence", p 627

¹⁴⁰ Jo Alice Leeds, "The History of Attitudes Towards Children's Art", *Studies in Art Education*, 30, no. 2 (1989) pp 93-103; Cunningham, "The Montessori Phenomenon", p 206

¹⁴¹ Bruce Holdsworth, "English Art Education between the Wars", *Journal of Art and Design Education*, 3, no. 2 (1984) pp 161-179; Malvern, "Inventing 'Child Art'"; numerous articles appear in *The New Era* on the teaching of art in this period.

¹⁴² Tomlinson, *Children As Artists*, pp 10-11; see also R. R. Tomlinson and John FitzMaurice Mills, *The Growth of Child Art* (London: University of London Press, 1947), pp 11-17

¹⁴³ For a chronology of publications and exhibitions relating to child art see Fineberg, *When We Were Young*, pp 199-271. For connections between child art and modernist artists see Fineberg, *The Innocent Eye*; Malvern, "Inventing 'Child Art'"

growing popularity of children's art to provide an innovative way of attracting an audience and communicating its message.¹⁴⁴ Recent historians of the First World War have drawn attention to the significance of exhibitions as part of the cultural landscapes of London, Paris and Berlin before the war, and their influence during the conflict as tools both to disseminate information, and to engender patriotism.¹⁴⁵ Writing of wartime exhibitions in London Goebel, Repp and Winter have argued 'that citizenship had to be performed' by attending exhibitions.¹⁴⁶ A similar motive was undoubtedly present in those attendees with political and humanitarian interests who visited Francesca's exhibition.

The evidence in support of the exhibition's humanitarian impact is more ambiguous. Reading the pamphlets and publicity materials produced at the time and subsequent historical literature about the exhibition seems to suggest that the pedagogical and artistic success eclipsed its humanitarian purpose. As we have seen Francesca's accompanying publications in the main stressed the artistic and educational interest, describing Cizek's classes, individual lessons, the children's work and backgrounds although later in life she maintained that the primary intention was philanthropic.¹⁴⁷ However, it has to be remembered that Francesca was writing to attract specific audiences and when writing a pamphlet for the FSC she gives more weight to the humanitarian aspects than

¹⁴⁴ "Paintings by Viennese Children", *The Burlington Magazine*, 37, no. 212 (1920) p 260

¹⁴⁵ Stefan Goebel, Kevin Repp & Jay Winter, "Exhibitions", in Jay Winter & Jean-Louis Robert, eds., *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919, Volume 2: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp 143-187

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p 148

¹⁴⁷ Hancock, *Franz Cizek*, p 71

in her educational pieces as the quotation which opens this chapter illustrates.¹⁴⁸

It may also be that surrounding publicity by the SCF and the Quakers was such that she had no need to emphasise this aspect in her pamphlets. Even if the primary audience attraction was children's art, the association of the exhibition with the name of the SCF left visitors in little doubt of its wider fundraising and humanitarian context. The SCF developed a series of powerful press campaigns in this period and on Friday 19th November, the day after the opening, it placed a full page appeal in the popular newspaper *The Daily Sketch* illustrated with a photograph of 'conditions of Destitution and utter Helplessness' in Vienna.¹⁴⁹ The appeal, of which the following extract provides a flavour, played on the gender of many of the relief workers and tugged at the heart strings of the audience:

It is a desperate appeal that is being made to YOU to-day. Imagine one of these heroic women workers appealing to you for the life of a child. Imagine the little one, terribly ill and racked with pain, whose lips have not touched food for many days. Then think of your own well-stocked larder; think of the little grumbles you may have indulged in when food and drink has not been exactly to your liking; and yet again bring back your mind to the awful plight of Europe's starving babies.¹⁵⁰

The choice of the classical scholar and internationalist Gilbert Murray to open the exhibition, in a session chaired by the former official war artist George Clausen, also made a political statement.¹⁵¹ Murray was known to be

¹⁴⁸ Francesca M. Wilson, *Vienna Handicrafts*, (London: Friends Service Council, 1921)

¹⁴⁹ Jones, *Women in British Public Life*, pp 81-2; *The Daily Sketch*, 19 November 1920, p 4

¹⁵⁰ *The Daily Sketch*, 19 November 1920, p 4, emphasis in the original

¹⁵¹ *The Times*, 18 November 1920, p 10; Murray had succeeded Dorothy Buxton and Eglantyne Jebb's uncle Richard Claverhouse Jebb as Professor of Greek at Glasgow

supporter of the FFC and as we saw earlier his wife, Lady Mary, and their daughter Agnes, were both actively involved in Quaker relief.¹⁵² Although no record of Murray's opening speech has been found, it is difficult to believe that the context of child distress in Vienna, the home of the child artists shown in the exhibition, would not have been explicitly drawn to the audience's attention.

In addition to the SCF's media campaigns, 'collection boxes' were present when the exhibition was shown, and the Quakers used the occasions to sell other Viennese arts and crafts and to disseminate literature about the situation in Vienna.¹⁵³ Freeman in her history of the SCF referred to accompanying lectures given on behalf of SCF by Dr. Paul Zingler, head of the Austro-American Institute of Education, which addressed 'controversial questions with a social implication' such as the effects of 'broken homes' and 'hunger' raised by the children's work, although unfortunately no other record has been found of the content of his lectures.¹⁵⁴ When assessing the exhibition's reception, Hawker maintained that visitors recognised 'the artistic, educational and human value of the work', and provided examples illustrating its impact.¹⁵⁵ Writing of the tour around Britain and Ireland he stated that the £160 raised at Dublin 'was sent direct to Vienna by request of the local people', whilst in Hull

University in 1889. He was also friendly with Jan Smuts, with whom he attended the League of Nations assembly in 1921 and who had prompted Hilda Clark's initial visit to Vienna in 1919. See Christopher Stray, "Murray, (George) Gilbert Aimé (1866-1957)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35159> [Accessed 27 July 2006]; Kenneth McConkey, "Clausen, Sir George (1852-1944)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32435> [Accessed 4 April 2006]

¹⁵² Murray is listed as a member of the Council and Economic Committee of the FFC in a collection of pamphlets, BL, 8275.s.5

¹⁵³ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M2; NAEA, FC/PL/1 E6 Western Association of Art Museum Directors, *The Cizek Exhibition*

¹⁵⁴ Freeman, *If Any Man Build*, pp 52-3

¹⁵⁵ Hawker, "Child Artistry from Vienna", pp 52-4

‘a party of children, who had come to see the exhibition, asked if they might be allowed to walk home and contribute their return train fares for the benefit of the starving children’.¹⁵⁶ When the exhibition was shown in Birmingham a review in a local newspaper closed with a reminder to readers of the ‘poor, uncared-for children’ and the exhibition’s ‘contribution to the world’s good and happiness’.¹⁵⁷

A similar awareness of the exhibition’s humanitarian purpose is evident in its reception in the USA. Writing in the *Bulletin of the Art Centre New York* the Centre’s Board of Directors stated that it was:

so impressed by the importance of this unusual exhibition that it feels a special privilege in bringing it to the New York public. In return we hope that children far and wide, and their parents and teachers, will show their appreciation of these talented young Viennese children who in the midst of a long struggle have been able to express such joyful hearts.¹⁵⁸

Similarly the 1925 catalogue for the exhibition’s tour of western US cities drew attention to the good causes supported by the exhibition with: ‘Returns from reproductions and collection boxes...devoted to the upkeep of the [Cizek] school, the strengthening of the Save the Children Fund and the maintenance

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ *The Birmingham Post*, 21 June 1921, p 6. The reviewer also contrasts Cizek theories on self-expression and non-intervention by the teacher with the contradictory evidence of his practice on display. In Birmingham over 50 leading citizens and religious leaders petitioned the city’s Quaker Lord Mayor, William Addington Cadbury, to establish a Lord Mayor’s fund for relieving the distress of children in Central Europe. Between 1919 and 1921 the Fund raised £30,058 for food and supplies and also supported a children’s home. The hosting of the exhibition in the city can be seen as part of this humanitarian campaign, see minute book, BA&H, 414255/IIR 18

¹⁵⁸ *Bulletin of the Art Centre New York*, December 1923, NAEA, FC/PL/1 E3 p 120

of a hospital for tubercular children in Austria', adding that the Confederation Internationale des Etudiants had also benefited.¹⁵⁹

There is no doubt that the exhibition fulfilled the aim of raising considerable amounts of money for child relief. Writing in 1922 Hawker estimated the total proceeds would ultimately reach £3,000 when all the related material had been sold.¹⁶⁰ A percentage of the proceeds was held in trust for Cizek and his class and most of the remaining money was given to the Friends. Of £1400 in hand by 16 July 1922, £600 was invested for maintaining Cizek's class, £50 went to Frau Zeibrück, a former pupil of Cizek's, who taught 'an interesting class in Vienna' and the remaining £750 was given to the Friends Mission in Vienna 'for child relief work'.¹⁶¹ The Friends used the money to support a convalescent home for 250 tubercular children at Krems.¹⁶² SCF records show that five months later in December a further allocation of £75 was made to Cizek, £25 to Zeibrück, and £200 to the Friends to be divided between Krems and food parcels.¹⁶³ Another measure of the humanitarian impact of the exhibition is that it was increasingly replicated as a device for raising political and humanitarian awareness in the following decades.¹⁶⁴ During the Spanish Civil War exhibitions of art by children from Republican educational colonies

¹⁵⁹ Western Association of Art Museum Directors, *The Cizek Exhibition*, NAEA, FC/PL/1 E6

¹⁶⁰ Hawker, "Child Artistry from Vienna", pp 52-3

¹⁶¹ Letter from Hawker to Jebb, 16 July 1922 and letter from SCF to Alice Clark, Austria Department, FEWVRC, 3 October 1922, both in SCF Archive, EJ 49

¹⁶² Letter from Alice Clark to Miss E. Sidgwick of SCF, 19 July 1922, SCF Archive, EJ 49

¹⁶³ Letter SCF to Hawker, 27 April 1923, SCF Archive, EJ 49. The minute books of the Austria and Hungary Sub-committee of the FEWVRC show large amounts of money being transferred from the SCF to the Friends' relief schemes in this period with a number of references to grants as large as £10,000 and £15,000, FL, FEWVRC/AH/M1-3

¹⁶⁴ Although I have found earlier references to art exhibitions being used to raise funds for children's charities the art on display was by recognised, adult artists. Similarly although there are several earlier exhibitions of art by children, such as the Royal Drawing Society exhibitions from 1890, these appear to have an educational or artistic purpose only.

appeared in Spain, Britain and the USA to elicit political and humanitarian support and raise money for Spanish relief, and during the Second World War two exhibitions of children's art appeared in London in aid of the Refugee Children's Evacuation Fund.¹⁶⁵

One of the major contributing factors for the exhibition's success in making both educational and humanitarian interventions was its advocacy by a well-connected network of influential educators, intellectuals, artists, social reformers and humanitarian activists, formed as an advisory committee under the name Children's Art Exhibition Fund. Unfortunately no archival records are known to survive for the CAEF and the only formal listing of the members appeared in one of Francesca's pamphlets published by the CAEF to accompany the exhibition.¹⁶⁶ As both Grosvenor and Fuchs have demonstrated telling the story of such a network, particularly one for which there is no formal archive, can be difficult.¹⁶⁷ A lack of documentary evidence can hamper our understanding of the dynamics of the group, and leave us with no means of answering the questions that inevitably arise about its constitution and activities.¹⁶⁸ How and why did these people come together to lend their support to an exhibition of children's art? Was it an active group or merely a list of 'names' to create a favourable impression on those purchasing the

¹⁶⁵ See Anthony Geist & Peter N. Carroll, *They Still Draw Pictures: Children's Art in Wartime from the Spanish Civil War to Kosovo* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Refugee Children's Evacuation Fund, *Children's Art from All Countries* ([London], 1941); Refugee Children's Evacuation Fund, *The War as Seen by Children* ([London, 1943]); Jutta Vinzent, *Identity and Image: Refugee Artists from Nazi Germany in Britain (1933-1945)* (Weimar: VDG, 2006). For further comment on these later exhibitions see Sian Roberts, "Exhibiting Children at Risk: child art, international exhibitions and Save the Children Fund in Vienna, 1919-1923", *Paedagogica Historica*, 45, nos. 1 & 2 (2009) pp 171-190

¹⁶⁶ Wilson, *The Child As Artist*, p 15

¹⁶⁷ Grosvenor, "The Art of Seeing", pp 507-34; Eckhardt Fuchs, "Networks and the History of Education", *Paedagogica Historica*, 43, no. 2 (2007) 185-97 p 197

¹⁶⁸ It may be that trawling through the personal correspondence of members, where it exists, may yield additional information but this is beyond the scope of this study.

pamphlets? Did they ever sit around a table together discussing the selection of paintings or the wording of the leaflets that were distributed under their name? In the absence of a traditional archive, how can one map the connections and shared motivations of this apparently disparate group of actors?

Stanley and Cunningham both suggest a similar approach to mapping overlapping networks and webs of connection by identifying patterns and relationships from easily obtainable biographical and historiographical sources.¹⁶⁹ This approach has been adopted here, as many of the group's members were well-known educators, activists and cultural figures for whom a body of biographical information exists.¹⁷⁰ This enables the mapping of connections across intersecting networks and organisations. Given the focus of this study this section will concentrate in the main on the women activists who shared an interest in progressive education and interventions in international child welfare as the dominating strand. Other strands could have been emphasised - shared ideas of childhood, a commitment to art, crafts and architecture as a force for moral and social improvement, activism in suffrage and labour politics, welfare activities with university settlements and boys clubs in the poorer districts of London, shared beliefs in Christian Socialism or

¹⁶⁹ Stanley, "Feminism and Friendship", pp 10-46, relating to feminist friendship networks; Peter Cunningham, "Innovators, networks and structures; towards a prosopography of progressivism", *History of Education*, 30, no. 5 (2001) pp 433-451, on interconnecting networks of progressive educationalists

¹⁷⁰ Use has been made of biographical dictionaries such as the DNB and the Dictionary of Women's Biography and of the indexes of standard texts on educational reform, welfare movements, women's movement etc. in this period. Some use was also made of online archival finding aids to identify individuals corresponding with each other etc. and of family history resources such as *Ancestry*, <http://www.ancestry.co.uk> although the latter's uses are limited in this context. Liddington has recently identified online resources primarily aimed at genealogists as a potentially useful resource for researchers of suffrage and women's history, see Jill Liddington, *Rebel Girls: Their Fight for the Vote* (London: Virago 2006) pp 3-4

Theosophy, and interlinked social, religious, political and kinship relationships.¹⁷¹

The CAEF displayed a number of the elements identified by Cunningham as present in an informal, 'horizontal' network in that it had similar links to other, often overlapping, networks and structures through the involvement of its principal actors, and it employed both the periodical press and patronage by members of the educational establishment to promote its objectives.¹⁷² As with all biographical research the links between some of the lesser known members are more speculative and Cunningham's comments on the 'missing' women in the historiography of progressive education and the prevalence of married activists working as 'couples', usually identified under the husband's name, inevitably come into play.¹⁷³

In common with most networks the CAEF had a number of pre-histories, embedded in previously existing networks and groups of activism, which become apparent when the principal actors' connections are identified. In this case the nodal link between them is Bertram Hawker. Some ten months before the exhibition opened in London, Hawker and other members and key

¹⁷¹ The broad range of the CAEF members' interests is reflected in the membership list which comprised of: Captain O. Ashford, Lena Ashwell, Mrs. A.E. Balfour, Barclay Baron, Valentine Bell, Brigadier Catherine Booth, Clutton Brock, Father Paul Bull, Lawrence Christie, George Clausen R.A., Maud Fletcher, Lucy Gardner, Bertram Hawker, Edmond Holmes, Lady Evelyn Jones, Hetty Lea, Prof. W.R. Lethaby, Sir Edwin Lutyens, Albert Mansbridge, Charlotte Mason, Alec Miller, Maude Royden, Sir Michael Sadler, Countess of Sandwich, Mrs. Philip Snowden, Francesca Wilson, Henry Wilson.

¹⁷² Cunningham, "Innovators, networks and structures", pp 433-51

¹⁷³ Ibid., pp 446-7; inevitably considerably less is known or can easily be discovered about the lives and activities of some of the women members; at the time of writing nothing is known about Maud Fletcher or Hetty Lea and comparatively little about the individual activities of the married women such as Mrs. A.E. Balfour or the Countess of Sandwich. For further comment on these issues see also Kay Ferres, "Gender, Biography, and the Public Sphere", in Peter France & William St Clair, eds., *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) pp 303-19

supporters of the CAEF were present at an international congress in February 1920 'for helping the Children in Countries affected by the War' at the Hotel des Bergues in Geneva.¹⁷⁴ In addition to Hawker (and Connie his wife who attended on behalf of the Armenian Refugees Fund, London) the British delegates included Dorothy Buxton, there like Hawker on behalf of the SCF, and Francesca attending on behalf of the FEWVRC. Also in attendance were two other members of the CAEF, Brigadier Catherine Booth, attending in her capacity as Secretary of Foreign Affairs for the Salvation Army, and Ethel Snowden attending on behalf of the Labour Party.¹⁷⁵ Booth is a well-known activist who undertook relief work with children in Europe after the First World War before going on to work with unmarried mothers and children as leader of the Salvation Army's Women's Social Work service.¹⁷⁶ Ethel Snowden (née Annakin) had a background in suffrage, peace campaigning and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and she and her husband, the Labour Member of Parliament Philip Snowden, were supporters of the FFC.¹⁷⁷ A former

¹⁷⁴ BL, P.P.1098.ccc, congress report, *Bulletin of the Save the Children Fund: Central Union, Geneva*, 1, no. 6, 10 March 1920. The delegates came from a number of European countries and the USA and their conclusions over the three days were to 'serve as a guide to the Executive Committee of the Union in the distribution of funds'.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 52-57. Other British and British based delegates to the Congress included: Harrison Barrow, John Henderson and Edith Pye for the Friends; Lady Blomfield [sic], Miss Brankart, Rt. Rev. Bishop Bury, Mr. Graham, Miss E. M. Hawkin, Dr. Hector Munro and Mr. Mac Neil [sic] Weir for SCF; M.W.A. MacKenzie, SCF Central Union; Mrs. J. Bliss and Rev. G. Colson for the Armenian Refugees Fund; C.K. Butler, Vienna Emergency Relief Fund, London; Rt. Rev. Lord William Cecil, Bishop of Exeter; Miss Christitch and Mrs. Carrington Wilde, Serbian Relief Fund, London; Rev. H.B. Ellison, Archbishop's Committee for Famine Relief, London; Dr. Leonard Findlay, SCF Section, Miss Alice Fitzgerald, Nursing Section, and Sir David Henderson, Director General, League of Red Cross Societies, Geneva; Rev. W. Marwick, Scottish National Committee; Rt. Rev. Bishop of Oxford for Archbishop of Canterbury; Lady Muriel Paget, Slovakian Relief Fund and Rumanian Red Cross, London; Rev. J.H. Rushbrooke, Free Churches of England; Dr. Ragutin Subotitch, Serbian Red Cross, London.

¹⁷⁶ Eva Burrows, "Booth, Catherine Bramwell (1883-1987)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39871> [Accessed 4 April 2006]; Jenny Uglow, ed., *The Macmillan Dictionary of Women's Biography*, 2nd ed. (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1991) p 78

¹⁷⁷ BL, 8275.s.5, FFC pamphlets

teacher, her international interests included the Women's International League, the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, and the League of Nations and she was also present at the International Congress of Women in Vienna in 1921.¹⁷⁸ A member of the Council of the SCF she also sat on the Council of the Anglo-Austrian Society in London alongside Eglantyne Jebb and Gilbert and Lady Mary Murray.¹⁷⁹

A number of the women CAEF members shared Snowden's background in suffrage including the pacifist and preacher Maud Royden, another FFC supporter, who also had strong connections to Quaker relief in Vienna through her close and longstanding friendship with Kathleen Courtney.¹⁸⁰ Courtney undertook relief with the Quaker Mission where she first met Francesca who, as we will see in the next part of this chapter, would later become Courtney's unpublished biographer.¹⁸¹ Royden corresponded with fellow CAEF member Albert Mansbridge, and was connected to the Oxford University extension movement, a connection shared by several of the male CAEF members.¹⁸² In 1914 she had attended a meeting of the peace organisation the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Cambridge with its then secretary, Lucy Gardner. Gardner was a Quaker and in addition to her involvement with the CAEF she was

¹⁷⁸ June Hannam, "Snowden, Ethel (1881-1951)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/48517> [Accessed 4 April 2006]

¹⁷⁹ SCF letterhead, SCF Archive, EJ 46; Anglo-Austrian Society letterhead, 1923, SCF Archive, EJ 45

¹⁸⁰ BL, 8275.s.5, FFC pamphlets

¹⁸¹ WL, Kathleen Courtney Papers, 7/KDC/K12/13

¹⁸² From 1917 Royden was a preacher at the City Temple Congregational Church in Holborn and in 1921 she established the Guildhouse as an ecumenical place of worship and social and cultural centre. She was connected to the Oxford movement through her relationship with Hudson Shaw, see Sheila Fletcher, "Royden, (Agnes) Maude (1876-1956)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35861> [Accessed 4 April 2006]

actively involved in the Christian Conference on Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC) as were her fellow CAEF members Barclay Baron, Paul Bull, Hetty Lea, Ethel Snowden and Lena Ashwell.¹⁸³

The feminist actress and theatre manager Lena Ashwell had also been involved in suffrage campaigns.¹⁸⁴ She was committed to educational reform through the arts and spoke at the New Ideals in Education conference at Stratford upon Avon in August 1921.¹⁸⁵ The conference theme was 'Education and Life' and the SCF exhibition was on display. Ever the actress, Ashwell spoke in the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre and 'pleaded for Drama', citing its beneficial effects as 'a means of self-expression' for 'difficult' children.

Speaking at the same conference were two of her male CAEF colleagues. The first was the arts and crafts architect, metalworker and educational reformer Henry Wilson, who later had his portrait painted by George Clausen and was closely associated with W.R. Lethaby through the Central School of Arts and Crafts and the Royal College of Art.¹⁸⁶ Lethaby was also a close friend of Harry Peach, a member of ILP who founded Dryad Handicrafts in 1918 to

¹⁸³ John Ferguson, *The Fellowship of Reconciliation*, [online] (1984) http://www.ifor.org/articles/IFOR_history_by_J._Ferguson_1984_-_Revised.doc [Accessed 13 April 2007]; Lucy Gardner (1863-1944) was involved with the Charity Organization Society, the Friends and COPEC, see obituary in *The Friend*, 1944 November p 827. The conference was held in Birmingham 5-12 April, 1924, chaired by William Temple, Bishop of Manchester. It included commissions on subjects such as 'Education', 'Relation of the Sexes' and 'Politics and Citizenship' see *Conference Handbook* (Birmingham: Birmingham Council for the COPEC Conference, 1924)

¹⁸⁴ Alias Lena Margaret Pocock, later Lady Lena Simson through her second marriage to the surgeon Henry Simson in 1908, Maggie B. Gale, "Ashwell, Lena (1872-1957)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30476> [Accessed 4 April 2006]

¹⁸⁵ IoE Archives, WEF/295, conference report by Violet M. Potter M.A. in *The New Era*, Vols. I & II, pp 243-4

¹⁸⁶ He was made a master of the Art Workers Guild in 1917 and in 1921 was president of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, see Fiona MacCarthy, "Wilson, Henry (1864-1934)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/38556> [Accessed 4 April 2006]. At the conference he spoke on 'The Creative Impulse Suppressed' and argued that 'the educational process should be "creator-making"' and that knowledge should be a 'dynamic...power to meet social need', see conference report by Potter op. cit., p 243

encourage the teaching of handicrafts in schools and who published a pamphlet by Francesca on Cizek and handicrafts in Vienna.¹⁸⁷ The conference was also addressed by Edmond Holmes on the theme of recreational activities and 'self-education'.¹⁸⁸ Holmes is part of another CAEF pre-history, the British Montessori Society. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Society in 1912 and sat on its committee with fellow CAEF members Bertram Hawker, Sir Michael Sadler and Albert Mansbridge.¹⁸⁹

Sadler was a supporter of the SCF and at the time was Vice Chancellor of Leeds University where he amassed a significant art collection.¹⁹⁰ He was an early British collector of Post-Impressionism and of Van Gough, organising an exhibition of his work at Oxford Art Club in 1924.¹⁹¹ This was a passion he shared with George Charles Montagu, husband of the American born Alberta (née Sturges) Countess of Sandwich.¹⁹² Although little is known about Alberta herself, her presence on the CAEF is an indication that she shared her husband's better-documented interests in art and progressive education.¹⁹³

Sadler, Sandwich, Ashwell, Holmes, Henry Wilson (no familial relation to Francesca) and Francesca illustrate the overlapping nature of networks of

¹⁸⁷ Leicester Museum Service, *Harry Peach and Dryad* [online] <http://www.gimson.leicester.gov.uk/leicesterdesigners/harry-peach-dryad> [Accessed 13 May 2007]; Francesca M. Wilson, *Professor Cizek Takes His Class* (Leicester: Dryad Handicrafts, [c.1921])

¹⁸⁸ Conference report by Potter op. cit., p 244

¹⁸⁹ Cunningham, "The Montessori Phenomenon", p 213

¹⁹⁰ Roy Lowe, "Sadler, Sir Michael Ernest (1861-1943)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35905> [Accessed 4 April 2006]

¹⁹¹ Martin Bailey, *Van Gough and Britain: Pioneer Collectors* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2006) pp 21, 25

¹⁹² Ibid., pp 14, 29, 100; *Who Was Who, 1961-1970*, Vol. 6 (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1972) p 1000

¹⁹³ In 1912 he had visited the Junior Republics in the USA and was instrumental in inviting Homer Lane to supervise the establishment of the Little Commonwealth as a self-governing community for 'difficult' children, see W.A.C. Stewart, *The Educational Innovators, Volume II: Progressive Schools 1881-1967* (London: Macmillan, 1968) pp 86-95

international relief activists and progressive educationalists, and indeed other examples could be cited. Beatrice Ensor, who as we have seen visited Cizek for example, was involved in relief for Viennese children in Britain in her capacity as secretary of the Famine Area Children's Committee.¹⁹⁴ She chaperoned a group of children en route from Vienna to a camp at Sandwich, via Rotterdam, an initiative funded, at least in part, by the SCF.¹⁹⁵

The CAEF network described above is only one of a number of networks in which Francesca participated to differing degrees. Despite her mother's conversion from the Society of Friends, her background as a 'birthright' Quaker placed her in tight knit circle of kinship and faith based connections, many of which assisted her participation in relief circles.¹⁹⁶ Similarly, her education at Newnham College introduced her to a network of women from similar class, educational and cultural backgrounds. As an activist over the course of many years from the First World War until the mid twentieth century she was part of a number of different but intersecting and overlapping networks. These networks were not static collections of people, but evolved organically according to her focus and interests at various times. The above consideration of the CAEF is intended as a case study illustrating how she participated in such networks, how they facilitated her activism, and the long-term influence that some of them had on her life as a whole.

¹⁹⁴ IoE Archives, DC/WEF/VII/296, "The Outlook Tower", *The New Era* (January 1922) pp 2-3

¹⁹⁵ IoE Archives, DC/WEF/VII/295, *The New Era* (April 1920) p 67

¹⁹⁶ For Quaker women and the significance of their kinship networks see Holton, *Quaker Women*; Sandra Stanley Holton, "Kinship and Friendship: Quaker women's networks and the women's movement", *Women's History Review*, 14, nos. 3 & 4 (2005) pp 365-84

III - 'I felt like a war profiteer - the ruined city had made me rich in impressions and experience',¹⁹⁷

The three years in Vienna 1919-1922 gave the greatest intellectual, aesthetic and romantic stimulus of my life, as well as the greatest experience in administration and organisation and practice in publicity. In Vienna I began writing articles for the Manchester Guardian and made the pamphlets for the Cizek Exhibition.¹⁹⁸

As these sentences from her autobiography written late in life demonstrate Francesca considered Vienna to be a place that had left a profound mark on her identity as a teacher, relief worker and author, and a place which had a significant influence on her subsequent life trajectory. What follows is an exploration of her response to the city - its landscape, characteristics, and people, and an attempt to analyse the way in which her experiences during her three years in Vienna resonated throughout her life.

For Francesca, Vienna was a city of contrasts. Despite her initial horror at its bleak poverty it rapidly developed into a stimulating and creative place, a place of colour and joy, history and politics, civilisation and culture; a place where she found 'this something else, that was intangible and that one may perhaps call an art of living'.¹⁹⁹ For all its gloom it was a romantic city, her lyrical

¹⁹⁷ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 137

¹⁹⁸ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 108

¹⁹⁹ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 133

responses to walking the city's streets reveal her joy in discovering the city's past, and the pleasure of discovery was bound up in the city's people and their conversations:

The old Austria lurks everywhere in Vienna, and yet it is possible to be there and not find it. One has to look for it. It is in the quiet eighteenth-century squares and fountains of the Inner City, in the Baroque churches with their green domes, which you come upon suddenly in the middle of a shopping centre, like St. Peter's...All this is the old Austria, but it would not have meant much to me if the Austrian who belonged to it had perished, stamped out by the gaudy, hustling world of the New Privileged. But though he [sic] was no longer in evidence, he could be found everywhere. He might be a taxi driver, an innkeeper, or a baron - you could tell him by his soft, diphthonged speech, by his good tempered, slightly cynical humour, by his understanding of living things, animal as well as human, his gift for intimacy.²⁰⁰

In Vienna Francesca found an attitude to intellectual life, culture, art and music that encapsulated the 'good taste', 'individuality' and critical qualities of the Austrian people. It was the people that made a difference and her account of her time in Vienna is dotted with quotations and extracts from her conversations with those she met:

But the most delightful talks I had were with people not interested in politics and outside the general stream of life, people who belonged to the old Austria, which I shall describe later. They were shabby and half-starved but undefeated in spirit. Their talk, graceful, whimsical, humorous, its cynicism tempered by kindness and gaiety was too capricious to record. I cannot recapture the gossamer threads out of which it was spun.²⁰¹

Her published recollections of her period in Vienna appear in the main in her autobiographical account *In the Margins of Chaos*, a book that she wrote in the early 1940s when Austria was again an enemy country and this is reflected in

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p 132

²⁰¹ Ibid., p 119

her advocacy of the Austrian people and their qualities. Reading *Margins of Chaos* we see how her experiences in Vienna fed into her opinions on anti-Semitism and socialism, and into the anti-Fascist views that she expressed later in the 1930s and 1940s. When writing of her period in Vienna she returned on a number of occasions to the anti-Semitism that she found in the city. When working to establish the depots and in her conversations with Austrian people she noted with surprise the degree of political tension that existed there, it was 'the first time I had seen politics taken so seriously'.²⁰² Not only were the depots accused of 'giving only Red babies food cards', but that the depot workers were 'in the hands of the Jews'.²⁰³

In her recollections on the beginnings of Nazi 'evil' she recalled seeing anti-Semitic demonstrations at the university and Jews thrown out of a concert hall, as well as conversations with a friend in Vienna who belonged to 'a secret conspiracy' but later grew disillusioned with the movement:

He talked of moral regeneration and social hygiene...Once he drew for me their symbol...I had never seen a swastika before, and I thought it very pretty. It was only when he told me later on that one of their aims was to purify the country from the "Jewish stain" that I was shocked.²⁰⁴

Although she herself wrote in disparaging terms about the Jewish 'nouveau riche', she was full of admiration for the cultural and intellectual capacities of other Jewish people whom she met. They are often equated with a type of modernity, that she later admired so much in Spain, and that she also associated with the Americans with whom she worked in Vienna. Similarly she

²⁰² Ibid., p 120

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., pp 117-8

was full of admiration for some of the leading Jewish women:

Frau Schwarzwald was a Jewess of tremendous vitality and energy. During the war and immediately after it she had blown through Vienna like a typhoon. The Austrian countryside was dotted with the holiday homes she opened for children. She had started the first common kitchens in Vienna and suggested to Switzerland that they should give Viennese children hospitality in their country. In 1900 she had opened the first girls' secondary school in Austria to be run on modern lines. She had brought up her girls to think for themselves and to prepare themselves for careers: she had given them a tradition of service, new to light hearted Vienna. Her enemies said that every Schwarzwald girl left school thinking herself a world event. One found them all over the city, running clubs, teaching in schools, nursing in hospitals, or being efficient private secretaries. When she said to me that defeat had been good for Austria, and that in ten years' time when people were no longer struggling for the bare necessities of life, they would realise it, I thought it was the bravest thing that I had heard, and showed faith and imagination as well as courage.²⁰⁵

On her return to Austria some ten years later Francesca recalled Frau Schwartzwald's words as she contemplated the benefits of socialism - the children's homes, TB hospitals, libraries, nursery schools, courtyards with statues and fountains, and the apartment houses that 'socialist fathers had built for 60,000 families' and let to them for cost of upkeep only.²⁰⁶

She found the Vienna socialists of 1919-22 truly inspirational 'because they had such hope for the future' and because they subsequently developed 'the most enterprising and intelligent socialist body that any city has seen, except in the U.S.S.R.'. ²⁰⁷ The initiatives that she admired were centred on children and their welfare - juvenile delinquency, child guidance clinics, youth courts, and the:

²⁰⁵ Ibid., pp 116-7

²⁰⁶ Ibid., pp 117

²⁰⁷ Ibid., pp 118, 122

brilliant Children's Quarantine Station (Kinderaufnahmestelle)... built for the purpose and had glass partitions, through which the children could be watched without disturbing them. Problem children were brought there and studied by experts for three or four weeks and then sent to suitable homes or institutions.²⁰⁸

She was full of admiration for Dr. Julius Tandler, who would develop in Vienna 'the best thought-out and organised single system in the world; a system in which children were looked after from the moment of their conception, right through youth' and she bitterly regretted his removal from office in 1934 and the demise of the enlightened system that she so admired.²⁰⁹

For Francesca Vienna was a city of inspirational and enlightened visionaries, and none was more visionary than Cizek. He was a significant and central figure in her time there and it is obvious that she, like many others, was captured by his charisma. Indeed her response to him in her published writings has something of the characteristics of the cult of the 'guru and the disciple' which Thomson has identified as a feature of the personality cults that surrounded several of the charismatic leaders of psychology and mysticism in the post-war period.²¹⁰ Cizek had 'magic for her'.²¹¹ On her first visit to the 'cosmopolitan' Cizek she 'understood the spell he had cast over Mr. Hawker'.²¹² He was 'the magician for whom all these little gnomes were working...it was only when he waved his wand that their powers were

²⁰⁸ Ibid., pp 119

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p 120

²¹⁰ Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, pp 77-9

²¹¹ In her obituary of Francesca, Elsie Duncan Jones remarks that 'the world was divided into those who had some kind of magic for her and those who had not', see Elsie E. Duncan-Jones, "Francesca Mary Wilson 1888-1981", *Newnham College Roll*, 1982. In her admiration of Cizek of course she was far from alone. From reading accounts of visitors to Cizek's class in the 1920s and 1930s many of the educators and artists appear to have been enthralled by his charisma, and his colleague Wilhelm Viola writes of him with a reverence which certainly merits the description guru and disciple.

²¹² Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 124-128

released'.²¹³ Indeed one historian of art education, commenting on Francesca and Viola's 'somewhat sycophantic reportage', condemned her pamphlets as 'mawkish' and sentimental.²¹⁴ A research student who interviewed her in July 1980 shortly before her death described her at 92 years old:

painfully slow of bodily movement but agile of mind, never more so in fact, that when talking of Professor Cizek and his beloved pupils. Her admiration of the man and his philosophy had obviously endured the near half century since she had last met him in 1933...She was always happy to talk of "The Professor" and delighted that his memory might be perpetuated by others taking an interest in his methods and philosophies.²¹⁵

She herself recorded how her contact with children and young people, particularly Cizek's pupils was instrumental in making her experiences in Vienna so joyful and later recalled that when she thought of Vienna her memories were predominantly of 'the laughter and gaiety of gifted children' rather than the 'starvation' and its relief.²¹⁶

However much she may have enjoyed her association with Cizek and his young artists, her primary reason for being in Vienna was humanitarian relief and there is no doubt that the time she spent in the city was instrumental in providing her with a wide range of relief practices, organisational skills, and experiences on which she later drew in Russia, Spain, Hungary and in Germany after the Second World War. So profoundly did she feel that she had benefited from the experience that she later wrote: 'I felt like a war profiteer -

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Sutton, *Artisan or Artist*, p 266

²¹⁵ Hancock, *Franz Cizek*, p 5

²¹⁶ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 128

the ruined city had made me rich in impressions and experience'.²¹⁷ Much of what she learnt came from the women with whom she worked in the Quaker Mission, many of whom shared her cultural and educational capital. Mostly from a middle class background, many of them had been similarly educated in Oxford or Cambridge women's colleges and drew on reserves of administrative and organisational skills developed as part of the suffrage movement or Quaker women's meetings, and of practical experiences of welfare in philanthropic activities and women's settlements before the First World War. Francesca writes in particularly glowing terms of the three best-known women of the Vienna Mission:

Dr. Hilda Clark, who started the work and was in charge of it for three years, could grasp a problem as a whole, and had the kind of constructive imagination that saw a way of tackling it, as well as the faith that overcomes all obstacles. Backed by the drive, energy, genius for detailed organisation and experience in infant welfare of Edith Pye, she was formidable. From time to time Kathleen Courtney came out to give advice and help, and it was possible to draw on the stores of her wisdom and her long experience in international affairs and in organisation. These three women had the right attitude to the people they were helping - respect, sympathy and unsentimental affection, and they were - as far as is possible in human beings - quite selfless in their attitude to their work. I am not thinking of the financial side, for many worked in Vienna at their own expense, but that all thought of personal publicity was anathema to them. They were pure in motive and quite incorruptible. This seems unnecessary to stress, but unfortunately I have seen relief workers (usually not among Friends) developing a *manie de grandeur*, when vested with unaccustomed authority and prestige.²¹⁸

Undertaking relief work in Vienna was very different to the work she had previously undertaken with the Serbs.²¹⁹ The key in Vienna was to take full advantage of working within a system that had well developed social services,

²¹⁷ Ibid., p 137

²¹⁸ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 138

²¹⁹ For an account of her work with the Serbs see Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 15-105

learning to work with the existing local authorities by adding value with additional resources and skills without getting in the way or disrupting provision. This way of working is characteristic of Quaker relief in the twentieth century and was the model of working which she later duplicated in Murcia. Another new experience, which again would be replicated in Southern Spain, was her pleasure at working with American Quakers whom she found stimulating and who brought 'great spit and polish' into relief work.²²⁰ In Vienna she met women who had trained at Hull House and other American settlements, an invaluable grounding in professional social work which she considered to be superior to that available in Britain, and which she regretted was unavailable to her when she left Newnham and had little option but to become a teacher:

I was much impressed by the way the American social workers set about things. It wasn't only that they had everything neat and efficient, with flawless card indexes and case papers - that I had expected - it was the infinite pains they took over every single person...well trained in social work and some had been with Jane Adams at Hull House, but I noticed the same thing when I went to America and lived on a settlement. They had the democratic approach, there was no condescension in their attitude, nothing of the Lady Bountiful touch too frequent in England...This close collaboration with Americans was a new thing for me, and it added greatly to the stimulus of the work in Vienna.²²¹

She was not the only British relief worker who valued this international collaboration; Clark in one letter was pleased to report to Pye that the American Dorothy Detzer 'says she loves the Mission as much as she did Hull House and she never thought that possible. I know it is a great compliment'.²²² Although one cannot help but sympathise with her earlier comment on 25th

²²⁰ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 139

²²¹ Ibid., p 123. For more on her views on 'democracy' in relief work see chapter five.

²²² Pye, *War and Its Aftermath*, p 58

September 1920 when, struggling with the challenges of providing leadership for her team, she commented on the 'delicate business' of handling 'all these capable and independent-minded women'.²²³

As we will see Francesca's relationships with Courtney, Pye and Clark stood the test of time. It was Clark who requested that Francesca go to Macedonia on behalf of the WILPF in 1929, Pye wrote a glowing review of *Margins of Chaos* when it was published in 1944, and she often stayed with them in their Hampstead home during the Second World War. Another lifelong friendship made at the Vienna Mission was with the American Dorothy North, who as we have seen collaborated with her to take the Cizek exhibition to the USA and who, with her husband, later assisted Francesca to buy a house in Hampstead.²²⁴ In a letter written to North in Vienna whilst Francesca was on leave at home in Newcastle we get a sense of her importance for Francesca:

Dearest D.N. What's this that Madeline Linford tells me about you going to Russia! My dear you can't, you daren't go now & leave me stranded in Wien! What a horrible thought! Can't you come along peaceably with me in November? Do write & tell me all about it. The more I think of it, the more its [sic] likely, as of course they do want Americans & now is the accepted time & the day of salvation or the need of it at least. Well, if you go you must wire for me to join you in November. Otherwise I really can't authorise it. And you wouldn't be so crool [sic], as to leave before I get back to you in September would you?²²⁵

The letter goes on to discuss 'a weekend with the quality' that Francesca spent at the country home of the Liberal peer Sir Wilfrid Lawson in Cumberland to which she was invited with the Hawkers.²²⁶

²²³ Ibid., p 54

²²⁴ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p ii

²²⁵ Bryn Mawr College Library, Dorothy North Haskins Papers, Series 1, Box 1, folder 15, 22 August 1922

²²⁶ Sir Wilfrid Lawson was a Liberal Member of Parliament for Cockermouth from 1910-1916.

The reference to the journalist Madeline Linford brings to the fore another important way in which Vienna influenced the course of Francesca's future life.²²⁷ It was in Vienna that she began to write for public consumption and the city had a significant part to play in her development as a writer. In the letter to North quoted above she enclosed an article on the WILPF conference held in Vienna in 1921, which had helped her 'gain 3 golden guineas' and which Linford had promised would appear in *The Manchester Guardian* the following Friday. The letter closed of a note of regret, however, as her article 'Oriental Serbia' had been returned by the same paper for 'not being feminine enough in interest' for the women's page, an accusation Francesca refuted arguing that it was 'simply swarming with females'.²²⁸

Whilst in Vienna she wrote a number of articles to publicise the exhibition and raise funds for the Mission, but three draft articles preserved among the papers of Dorothy North in Bryn Mawr College Library, are of a different nature in that they are not focused on her relief work or a humanitarian cause and demonstrate that she was also trying to carve out an identity as a essayist or journalist at this time.²²⁹ Writing articles for the press is a characteristic which continues during her relief work in Russia, her time as a teacher in Birmingham, and during her activities in Spain, and this aspect of her writing

²²⁷ For information on Madeline Linford see appendix one p 326; at this time she worked as a journalist for *The Manchester Guardian* and was the feminist editor its women's section between 1923-35, see Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004) p 109

²²⁸ Bryn Mawr College Library, Dorothy North Haskins Papers, Series 1, Box 1, folder 15, 22 August 1922

²²⁹ The articles are a travel piece entitled "Vienna", "The Wienerin" on women in Vienna, and "Oriental Serbia" which discusses the Muslim community in Petch and their attitudes to women, Bryn Mawr College Library, Dorothy North Haskins Papers, Series 1, Box 2, folder 9

activity is discussed in the following chapters. Similarly her first published book, *Portraits and Sketches of Serbia*, was completed and published whilst she was in Vienna in 1920. In 1921 she published her three pamphlets on Cizek and his methods, which were followed in 1922 by her book on the children's drawings of Christmas for which Edmund Dulac wrote the introduction. Her only other book publication before the Second World War is also a part of the legacy of Vienna. *Yugoslavian Macedonia*, which will be discussed in chapter three, was published by the WILPF in 1930 and was the outcome of a journey undertaken at Hilda Clark's request to investigate the political situation in Macedonia in 1929.²³⁰

Vienna was also closely connected to another facet of her writing. In addition to writing autobiographical accounts, Francesca was also a biographer. Indeed, one could go as far as to describe her as an auto/biographer, as her biographical writings display many of the auto/biographical practices discussed in chapter one. Although she only published one completed biography, that of Eglantyne Jebb, she also wrote at least four other biographical sketches including one of Nikolai Bachtin, which will be dealt with in chapter three, and three other pieces which appear to have been intended for publication as a group biography entitled *Three Twentieth Century Women of Action*. Although her subjects - Dame Kathleen D'Olier Courtney, Geraldine (Gem) Jebb and Margaret McFie (whom Francesca called Magavee in imitation of the way her name was pronounced by the Serbs) - are all interesting women in their own right, her biographical writings will be critically read here for what they tell us

²³⁰ Francesca M. Wilson, *Yugoslavian Macedonia*

about Francesca's identity and her relationship with the city of Vienna. What does her choice of subjects and the way in which she wrote about them tell us about her?

The most substantial study is her biography of Eglantyne Jebb, which is closely associated to Francesca's experiences in Vienna.²³¹ In this biography

Francesca chose a woman who in many ways was very similar to her, and with whom she had a personal connection. This is a consistent and crucial element in her choice of subject, writing of her decision to write about Courtney, McFie and Gem Jebb she explained: 'I knew them well and admired them greatly'.²³²

Embodied within this connection was a desire to see their contributions recognised, and she was clearly influenced by the interest in women's history in the 1970s that emerged as part of second wave feminism, choosing the first United Nations International Women's Year in 1975 as her potential publication date as it seemed 'an appropriate moment to snatch them from oblivion'.²³³ It is hard not to read a reflection on her own story in her comment that their lives deserved recording although they themselves 'expected to remain anonymous and forgotten'.²³⁴

In contrast to Courtney, McFie and Gem Jebb, it is unclear whether she knew Eglantyne as there is no record that they actually met, although their networks of connections, Francesca's friendship with Gem and Eglantyne junior (Eglantyne senior's cousins), and the spheres in which both women were

²³¹ Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*. A note in Francesca's hand on my copy of the biography given by Francesca to Gerardo [Ascher] and Edith in July 1967 records that the royalties were donated to the SCF.

²³² WL, KDC/K12/14

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

active for the SCF in the early 1920s, make it hard to believe that their paths did not cross. However, Francesca usually referred to her meetings with her subjects, often quoting extensively from her conversations with them and, although she wrote about Jebb as if she knew her well, on this aspect she was silent. Irrespective of whether they met or not, Jebb shared numerous characteristics with Francesca's other female subjects, and with Francesca herself. All five women were educator activists who shared a middle or upper class upbringing at the end of the nineteenth century and all were highly educated, attending women's colleges at Cambridge or Oxford. They all broke in some way with what was traditionally expected of women of their class and time; they shared an interest in international issues (particularly the Balkans), in travel, in the welfare of the young, and they all had experience of engaging directly in political or humanitarian activism. Four of them remained unmarried, preferring a single life of scholarship or activism; McFie married a Serbian but when his death left her and their two children with limited means of financial support she returned to Britain and to life in communities of women, firstly at a Girls High School and then at Newnham College in Cambridge.

It is not difficult to see why Eglantyne Jebb appealed to Francesca as a subject. The opening paragraph of her biography borders on the hagiographical, evoking the memory of Florence Nightingale. It is rescued only by her recognition, which is elaborated upon in the body of the text, that Jebb was not a one-dimensional 'saint' but a complex character, who suffered from episodes of melancholia and crises of confidence. Indeed her complexity was part of her attraction for Francesca:

Much has been written about the Save the Children Fund but little about its founder, Eglantyne Jebb. Yet she was by no means a run-of-the-mill do-gooder. She was as interesting and complex a character as Florence Nightingale. Passionate, poetic, witty, danger-loving, intellectual and at the same time mystical, and in her youth a great beauty, like Florence Nightingale she was tormented by a sense of mission and a feeling of guilt until she had found what her mission was. In the last ten years of her life, she believed this mission was to save first of all the children of our enemies and later the children of the world, not only from death through starvation, but from growing up crippled morally as well as physically because of hunger and neglect in childhood. She dedicated herself to this self-imposed mission with all the intensity and passion of a deeply religious nature until in 1928, she died at the early age of fifty-two. The work she started still goes on. Its healing touch is found all over the world.²³⁵

Francesca paid a good deal of attention to Jebb's family background and her early life and education at Lyth in Shropshire which, despite the fact that she 'rebelled against many aspects of it, [was] of great influence on her'.²³⁶ This is one of a number of ways in which she considered Jebb's life to be a valuable window onto wider historical subjects, an upbringing 'typical of the Victorian era' and therefore 'of historical and sociological interest'.²³⁷ Her study was based on detailed archival research, and in her introduction she discussed her labour process and some of the methodological issues which she encountered in the course of her research such as the difficulty of distinguishing between nicknames and of dating much of the collection of letters and private diaries.²³⁸ She also faced the challenge of selection encountered by all biographers confronted by a mass of evidence - what to emphasise and what to ignore. Francesca felt fortunate in being able to disregard 'a good portion of the letters...especially those between mother and daughters...full of homely things'

²³⁵ Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, p 9

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p 11

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 9-11

but was conscious of needing to read all of them for fear of missing ‘some precious nugget’.²³⁹ Her archival research was complemented by her access to members of the Jebb family and by drawing on her own experiences. She placed herself very firmly, and very consciously, in her biographical text. Indeed the chapter entitled ‘The Save the Children Fund in Action’ is written in the first person and is arguably far more Francesca’s story than it is that of Eglantyne’s; she consciously chose to ‘tell only of work I knew personally and which was especially near to Eglantyne’s heart’.²⁴⁰ Interestingly, she also used the chapter to write in considerable detail about another woman activist to whom she was very close and whom she admired greatly, Dr. Katherine Macphail [sic] and her Children’s Hospital in Serbia, which was funded in part by the SCF.²⁴¹ In a passage that neatly captures her use of life story vignettes in almost all of her writings she explains why she decided to focus on Macphail and her hospital to illustrate the importance of Jebb and the SCF for her readers:

If I have told at some length this little bit of the work of the Save the Children Fund, so minute when compared with all it has done since its inception for millions of children in scores of different countries, it is because to ordinary mortals millions don’t exist. It is like trying to grasp eternity. Our eyelids are not weighed down by the sufferings of forgotten peoples. We prefer to leave them forgotten. We are as frightened by the thought of them as Pascal was by ‘le silence des grands espaces’. But that Sherifa and Voyslav and Mirko were saved to grow up healthy human beings – that has meaning for us. When people deride philanthropy and the efforts of do-gooders who try to rescue children we can think of them.²⁴²

However, it is not just when writing about Vienna that she used the ‘autobiographical I’; reflections on, and comparisons to, her own upbringing

²³⁹ Ibid., p 11

²⁴⁰ Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, p 187, footnote 1

²⁴¹ Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, pp 187-198.

²⁴² Ibid., p 198

abound in the text. Occasionally she drew explicit parallels with her own experiences, for example when writing of the deficiencies of the governesses who educated Victorian and Edwardian girls such as Jebb, Jane Harrison and Ethel Smyth she inserted the following reflection in parenthesis:

(My own were also grossly ignorant, chosen for their sound evangelical opinions and not their learning. They were brave: they taught us French pronunciation exactly as if it were English. We were devoted to them.)²⁴³

Other references are less explicit but echo reflections on her own life in other texts, prompting the reader to question whether they are conclusions borne out of her own personal experiences. There are numerous examples - her comments on the influence that Jebb's father had on her beliefs and education; her enjoyment of reading parties and other social activities at university; her reflections on the difficulties that the Jebb children and other members of the family had in understanding their mother's religious conversion (her own mother's conversation from Quakerism to the Plymouth Brethren must surely have been in her mind); or Jebb's resentment of 'the shackles of caste, the artificialities of class distinction' in, what elsewhere in the text Francesca referred to as 'Snobbish England'.²⁴⁴ She also wrote convincingly of Jebb's fear and despair as a young teacher facing an unruly class for the first time - the 'depths of shame' and 'desire for flight' which 'the victim doesn't discuss' (possible echoes of Francesca's own first term 'disaster' teaching at Bedales).²⁴⁵ As a teacher herself, Francesca regretted that Jebb's 'exceptional' teaching gifts were given so little space to develop in the

²⁴³ Ibid., p 13

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p 83

²⁴⁵ Ibid., pp 27, 29, 67, 31, 76; Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 132

elementary girls schools of the period, and that she hadn't chosen to work in one of the girls' high schools 'with small classes and a curriculum flexible enough to have allowed Eglantyne scope for her innovations', contrasting this with her own experience:

I remember personally, (a decade or two later), the pleasure and amusement I had over children's poems and plays, the illustrated autobiographies they wrote for compositions, the history expeditions one took them. There was more fun than misery in teaching older girls at a time when schools were less examination conscious than they are now and it was a waste that Eglantyne was deprived of it.²⁴⁶

This insight into Francesca's own teaching methods illustrate the effect that her experiences with Cizek in Vienna had on her methods as a teacher; he undoubtedly affirmed her belief in the need for a creative approach to her subject (to which we will return in chapter three), and the illustrated autobiographies referred to above were a direct borrowing from his pedagogical techniques.

She closed her biography of Jebb much as she started it, with a reiteration of the value of Jebb's work and her part in the development of an internationalist conscience. It also emphasised the features of Jebb's personality that Francesca found so attractive, echoing similar statements made about other women activists such as her description of Hilda Clark quoted earlier:

Her niece, Eglantyne Buxton, who saw a great deal of her from the hopeless-seeming beginnings of the Save the Children Fund to her last days in Geneva, feels that despite black moods her life was a challenge to pessimism and fatalism. She points out that the world views which are

²⁴⁶ Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, p 96

commonplaces now were rare fifty years ago, that Dorothy Buxton and Eglantyne were pioneers of the international outlook which in our day has made voluntary societies like Oxfam and United Nations' Agencies proliferate. The sisters helped to change the whole climate of opinion. The magnitude of this achievement is hard to assess. Part of Eglantyne's gift of leadership came from her belief in people; she made them feel they could do a great deal, gave them a sense of living in a world of heightened significance, lifted them out of their own lives...In the words of the 17th century poet Chapman, Man is a torch, born in the wind...Born in the wind, in her last years Eglantyne became a torch.²⁴⁷

Francesca's experiences in Vienna also form a substantial part of her biographical sketch of Dame Kathleen D'Olier Courtney, a woman whom she knew and admired and who shared many of her internationalist, political and humanitarian ideals. It was in the Vienna Mission that the two women met for the first time and in subsequent decades Francesca stayed with her occasionally at the home she shared in Hampstead with Hilda Clark, Edith Pye and Edith Eckhart, an economics lecturer at the London School of Economics. By the time Courtney arrived in Vienna in 1920 she was already a woman with a reputation as a significant activist.²⁴⁸ She believed passionately in the cause of international peace and attended the international peace conference at The Hague in 1915, one of only three British women to do so, before co-founding the WILPF, the organisation on whose behalf Francesca went to Macedonia in 1929.²⁴⁹ Although not a Quaker, she had undertaken relief work with Serbians in Salonika and Corsica before her period in Vienna. For Francesca, who had been at the Vienna Mission for some months when Courtney arrived, she was

²⁴⁷ Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, p 220, no quotation marks in the original

²⁴⁸ WL, KDC/K12/13, p 8. For information on Courtney see appendix one p 321.

²⁴⁹ Gertrude Bussey & Margaret Tims, *Pioneers For Peace: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom 1915-1965* (London: WILPF, 1980) p 19; see also Anne Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women: Feminist Peace Campaigners of the Great War* (London: Pandora Press, 1985)

‘a radiant presence, full of life and fun, as well as being an exceptionally experienced administrator’.²⁵⁰

Francesca’s incomplete biography of Courtney displays many of the same characteristics as that of Eglantyne Jebb. A large part of it was written in the first person and it drew extensively on Francesca’s own experiences and memories, and on her conversations with Courtney. Francesca made consistent use of reported speech in her writings, whether to illustrate the plight of refugees or children in distress, or to add authority and interest to her biographical pieces. Her belief in the power of hearing people’s own words, and her practice of taking verbatim notes in her own diaries and correspondence, is explained in the following quotation taken from *Rebel Daughter*: ‘Writers of diaries too seldom realize that where descriptions, however excellent - and Eglantyne’s are good - fade in interest, conversations remain living and amusing’.²⁵¹

In addition to her use of Courtney’s conversations with her she also quoted extensively from Courtney’s correspondence with Maude Royden as a way of allowing her to speak for herself and of illustrating their friendship. Again, many of Courtney’s qualities and characteristics that appealed to her echo her own personality or illustrate an aspect of it. She wrote for example of Courtney’s lack of interest in material wealth and possessions, of the effect that the lack of available training in social work had on her career choices, and on the need for a ‘cause’ to provide a sense of meaning in life and combat

²⁵⁰ WL, KDC/K12/13, p 1

²⁵¹ Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, p 98

depression or low spirits.²⁵² Again Francesca placed herself in the biography. When reflecting on Courtney's work for women's suffrage she interrupted the narrative to tell of her own conversion to suffrage whilst at Newnham by Ray Costello (later Strachey) who persuaded Francesca to march in a suffrage procession in 1911. The march had the distinction of being 'the only happy day' in her term at Bedales where she was teaching at the time, but on the whole she found suffrage a burden 'for I knew I was boring people when I talked about it. I suppose it was my duty to do so, as when as a child I had to ask people if they were saved and preach the gospel to them'.²⁵³

Francesca and Courtney also shared an interest in Serbia, although she conceded that 'Kathleen was not as interested in picturesque Serbian customs as Margaret McFie and I were'.²⁵⁴ She ascribed this to Courtney's lack of sentimentality and refusal 'to see her protégés through rose-coloured spectacles', and to the fact that her first contact with refugees was with 'this sort of Macedonian riff-raff rather than with honest-to-God Serb women and children and chitchas (old men)'.²⁵⁵ Courtney had worked in Bastia (Corsica) receiving 'hoards' of refugees from Salonika, with little chance to get to know individuals: 'And people in masses, especially poor, bewildered, disorientated refugees are not attractive'.²⁵⁶

Francesca ended her biographical sketch of Courtney with a brief assessment of her work during the Second World War, recalling occasions following

²⁵² WL, KDC/K12/13, pp 1; 31; 23-4

²⁵³ Ibid., p 26

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p 32

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p 30

²⁵⁶ Ibid., pp 30-1

Francesca's return from Hungary in June 1940 when she stayed with her in Hampstead and Courtney's 'valiant little figure, dressed in the uncompromising uniform of an official Air Raid Warden, sallying forth from her home in 44 Upper Park Road'.²⁵⁷ Francesca admired Courtney's talent as a speaker, her dedication to her cause, and her 'intellectual clarity and the warmth of her personality', and their respect for one another was mutual. An entry in the FEWVRC minutes in 1920 records that 'K.D. Courtney has consented to go to Budapest for a time' provided that Francesca Wilson is prepared to go with her so that she can leave the work in her hands'.²⁵⁸ They were obviously fairly similar in personality as well as beliefs; in her sketch Francesca noted that 'people loved Kathleen and she loved them in return - that, is,[sic] the chosen few who were like-minded and had qualities she respected', a phrase which is very reminiscent of one which appears a few years later in Francesca's own obituary by Elsie Duncan Jones.²⁵⁹

Francesca's biographical portrait of Margaret McFie is also written in the first person and, as with the others, could be said to be as much Francesca's story as it is that of McFie.²⁶⁰ In addition to a similar education and career, Francesca and McFie also shared devoutly religious backgrounds; McFie was brought up and educated as a strict Roman Catholic and leaving the faith alienated her from her family. Francesca greatly admired McFie for her

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p 42

²⁵⁸ FL, FEWVRC/AH/M2, 22 April 1920. The committee had been enquiring whether Courtney was willing to go to Budapest for some weeks.

²⁵⁹ WL, KDC/K12/13, p 40; Duncan-Jones, "Francesca Mary Wilson 1888-1981"

²⁶⁰ CUFOSL, IH A/33. The document is part of the papers of Isaline Horner, a former pupil of McFie at Priorsfield. For information on Margaret McFie see appendix one p 327.

intellect and for similar qualities to those which attracted her to her other biographical subjects:

In her serenity, in her dedication to duty, her self-discipline, her orderliness, indifference to possessions, in the reserve with which she hid her feminine longings and passions (and these were strong) - in all these ways Margaret might have been a nun, although obedience would have pressed her hard and her critical assessment of people and situations and her caustic speech would have been shocking in a convent and might have hindered the promotion which she would certainly have felt to be her due.²⁶¹

The outbreak of the First World War changed McFie's life; she joined the Serbian Relief Fund in 1915, reasoning in a card to her friend Gertrude Armfield (née Uttely) that it was 'the cause that appeals most to me as straight forward and clear'.²⁶² Francesca however thought differently, and she ascribed a motivation to McFie that echoes her description of her own discussed in chapter five:

She did not mention that what really appealed to her was the adventure of launching into the unknown, into an activity that did not preclude discomfort and danger nor that she already sensed in herself the sort of power that Florence Nightingale had of bringing order out of chaos.²⁶³

Francesca had heard of McFie's activities with Serbians in Corsica from Ka Cox, the Neo-Pagan and sometime partner of Rupert Brooke with whom she had studied history at Newnham, and subsequently met her for the first time when she travelled with her to Corsica on behalf of the Serbian Relief Fund in 1917. Francesca recalled that she herself was very excited but apprehensive at the thought of the journey; she had never met a Serb and did not at that time

²⁶¹ CUFOS, IBH A/33, p 1

²⁶² Ibid., p 3

²⁶³ Ibid.

speaking their language, and having the experienced Miss McFie to accompany her was a 'great reinforcement'.²⁶⁴ Her description of the twenty-three hour train journey from Paris to Marseilles quoted in McFie's biography but taken from Francesca's own diary shows us again Francesca's enjoyment of the landscape:

Our journey from Paris to Marseilles, which took twenty three hours, was made dramatic by a violent storm. 'The Camargue was perfectly wonderful', I wrote, 'with all white poplars and willows swaying in the wind and the surface of its streams blanched with rain and reflections of the clouds. I shall never forget it. If I had been a Pope, I should never have left Avignon.'²⁶⁵

Francesca was surprised by the Serbs' warm reception of McFie when they reached Bocagnano in Corsica and she quoted extensively from her own diary to describe the scene. She concluded that McFie was 'one of the very few women who are impersonal in their work...She has the single mind that is so very hard for a woman to attain but which one finds often enough in men (it is so much easier for them). She is a remarkable girl'.²⁶⁶ She continued with a very romantic description of McFie as a 'dark devoyka (Serbian for maiden)' who reminded her of a 'Perugino Madonna' and to whom the 'unfortunate, the timid, and the lost' would turn to for help:

'This sounds exaggerated', I continue, 'Of course it is an idealistic account but what is idealism after all but 'a flaming vision of reality'? I can talk of Miss McFie because I do not know her well and because I feel quite impersonal towards her. Oddly enough I have no desire to know her intimately. If I ever do I shall quite likely know her less than I do now.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p 6

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p 7

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p 8

From being a symbol she would become just a pal about whom I could recount all sorts of little things, whimsical and curious but not big.²⁶⁷

Her recollections of McFie are peppered with an almost mystical reverence and repeated references to her as a 'saint' and 'Lady Abbess', above such human frailties as love and utterly dedicated to her work.²⁶⁸ Francesca attributed her own willingness to absorb herself in the Serbian language and culture to McFie's influence, a decision which turned her time in Serbia into:

a remarkable experience, one of the most remarkable of my life...For me it was like living in the middle ages with all their colour, craftsmanship, superstitions, folk memories, ancient customs, home-made festivals and shocking crudities.²⁶⁹

Both Francesca and McFie were treated differently to Serb women by the Serb men, in being allowed for example to sit and drink at the table during the feast of Pantaleimon.²⁷⁰ McFie also shared Francesca's love of walking and she fondly recalled their expedition to climb 'the forbidding Monte d'Ora', adding that 'Magavee was a strapping young woman who loved an outdoor life and long expeditions in unexplored country'.²⁷¹ After the Armistice McFie left for Serbia itself, where she was later joined by Francesca in February 1919. McFie went on to marry a Serb, Mika Dimitrijevitich and after the ceremony at a Russian Orthodox church in London returned with him to live in Belgrade where she was one of the founders of an Institute for the Blind at Semlin, re-

²⁶⁷ Ibid.. The quotation 'An ideal is often but a flaming vision of reality' comes from *Chance: A Tale in Two Parts* by Joseph Conrad, 1913, emphasis in the original.

²⁶⁸ CUFOS, IBH A/33, p 11. This last comment was prompted by the speculation of their fellow relief workers, Dorothy Brown and Miss Hill, that McFie and Francesca's brother Maurice who was a relief worker in Bizerta with McFie would marry. He later married Dorothy who was known as Brankitza to the Serbs.

²⁶⁹ CUFOS, IBH A/33, p 9

²⁷⁰ Ibid..

²⁷¹ Ibid., p 10

educating blind soldiers and civilian adults and children, and where Francesca visited them in June 1921 whilst serving in Vienna.²⁷² When Mika succumbed to an unspecified mental illness in 1930 their two children, John and Jane, were sent to England to be followed by their 'penniless' mother. Mika died in 1931. After borrowing money to complete a course in institutional management at King's College, London, McFie secured a post as housekeeper at Bridlington Girls High School and in 1934 she was appointed Domestic Bursar at Newnham where Francesca, as a Newnham Associate from 1942-55, would often stay with her.²⁷³ Francesca remained close to her until McFie's death in 1971.

The Vienna link also played a part in another of Francesca's subjects for 'Three Twentieth Century Women of Action', the educator and cousin of Eglantyne, Geraldine Emma May (Gem) Jebb, who Francesca first met at Newnham.²⁷⁴ Again the biography was based on Francesca's recollections of Gem and began with 'I', recalling their first meeting. She went on to describe how they got to know one another during Francesca's visits home to Newcastle between 1919 and 1929 when Gem was a lecturer at Armstrong College and lived at the Gateshead Settlement.²⁷⁵ Gem shared many of Francesca's characteristics including a lack of interest in clothing, a sense of fun, a love of poetry, and above all a love of travel and walking. Gem also had:

²⁷² Ibid., p 19

²⁷³ CUFOS, IBH A/33, pp 25-7

²⁷⁴ Francesca M. Wilson, "Gem Jebb: A Portrait", RHUL Archives, BC RF141/1/1, pp 2, 11. Gem was born in 1886, went up to Newnham as a student in 1909, and subsequently became a lecturer in Economics there in 1917.

²⁷⁵ RHUL Archives, BC RF141/1/1, p 2

a thirst for vagrancy, the love of adventure and travel which was part of her make-up. She was often clamped down by an overtender conscience over family claims and professional duties - but her spirits were most exhilarated when she was exploring new country, scrambling up mountains or losing her way across unfamiliar tracks.²⁷⁶

Francesca's 'most delightful memories' of her were of their 'tramps and walking tours'.²⁷⁷ She admired Gem's way of engaging people in conversation citing an occasion soon after Francesca's return from Russia when on a walking tour they stopped at the cottage of an elderly couple:

The old man had been all his life a farm labourer with the disgracefully low earnings we thought correct in those days to give those on whom our middle-class way of life depended. Gem drew them both out on their activities and life-style. They answered her questions eagerly because they sensed that they came from a sympathetic interest and understanding. I listened absorbedly, although I felt too shy to take part.²⁷⁸

Her recollections of a Northumbrian ramble with Gem after Francesca's brother Maurice's death in 1925, give an insight into Francesca's reaction to this sad event, her realisation of 'the uniqueness of human beings' and of a 'gap that would never be filled'.²⁷⁹ A large proportion of her memoir of Gem concerns their trip to Italy with another friend from Newnham, Mary Rees and her sister Margaret.²⁸⁰ No date is given, but Francesca described it as April in the year after Gem became principal of Bedford College (she was appointed in 1929 and took up her post in 1930), and further states that Hemingway's *Farwell to*

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p 12

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p 2

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p 3

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p 4

²⁸⁰ Mary Rees had also been engaged in international relief work in Holland during the First World War, Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 7

Arms had recently been published (first published in 1929).²⁸¹ It was during the Italian trip that Francesca shared her plans to adopt an orphan with Gem and Mary, who thought it a good idea and stated she might do the same. Francesca recalled Gem's answer that Mary 'would make too heavy weather with your orphan. Francesca will take him lightly and let him go his own way'.²⁸² It was shortly after this holiday that Francesca 'adopted', among others, eleven year old Misha Sokolov.

By the time this journey took place Francesca had been living in the same city as Gem's family for several years. In 1919 Gem's sister, Eglantyne, who had been a resident tutor at Somerville College from 1913, accepted a post in the Education Department at Birmingham University and the Jebb home moved to Birmingham where it remained until about 1932.²⁸³ It was also in Birmingham that Francesca herself was to make her home in 1925 and it is to Birmingham, and its part in Francesca's life story, that this study also now turns.

²⁸¹ Francesca records that she gave it to Gem to read after reading it aloud to Bachtin in a park in Solihull. They had both found it 'real and moving' but Gem's dislike of it disappointed Francesca.

²⁸² RHUL Archives, BC RF141/1/1, p 6

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p 13

CHAPTER THREE

BIRMINGHAM: FRAGMENTS AND THE ‘FUGITIVEST GLIMPSES’¹

Contrary to practice elsewhere in this study, this chapter does not take its title from a quotation written by Francesca about the place in question.

Descriptions of Birmingham, or the place it held in her life, are few and far between in her texts, despite the fact that she spent a considerable part of her life in the city. This apparent absence of Birmingham as a place in her life-story, and the issues involved in researching and telling this episode in her life is the focus of this chapter. It is organised in three parts. The first part will narrate what is known of Francesca’s life in Birmingham, beginning with her journey to the city, and her activities and teaching career over the fifteen years that she was settled there. Part II focuses on the silences in the record for this period and related issues of access and interpretation of the archival sources and her published work. In the third part of the chapter I focus on how her humanitarian activism was played out in the city and how it laid the basis for her future activity. In contrast to Vienna and Murcia she was not engaged in relief in the field but concentrated on popular education initiatives, raising awareness of international issues through a variety of media, a process which continued during the Second World War after she had left Birmingham.

¹ Vienna diary, 23 May 1920

I - 'When I arrived in Birmingham my life seemed to me at an end'²

Francesca moved to Birmingham shortly before taking up her appointment as a history mistress at one of the city's elite girls' schools, the Edgbaston Church of England College for Girls, in January 1925. Having recently celebrated her thirty-seventh birthday, her teaching career to this point had been short and somewhat fragmented, and her life unusual and nomadic. After leaving Vienna she went to Russia in September 1922 where she spent several months undertaking famine relief for the Friends in Pasmorowka, a village some 25 miles of Buzuluk in the province of Samara.³ As we have seen following her return from Russia she also spent some time in the USA with her exhibition, but otherwise I know little of her time in Britain until her appointment in Birmingham. As the quotation which opens this section implies, later in life she recalled this period as an unhappy time, a point to which I will return shortly. However, before turning to consider her activities in Birmingham in more detail I want firstly to briefly explore the journey that had brought her to the city.

In some senses life in Edgbaston and Birmingham must have seemed fairly familiar to one who had grown up in a middle class Quaker household in the Jesmond area of Newcastle upon Tyne. Both were manufacturing cities sharing a reputation for religious dissent and political radicalism; where a numerically small percentage of non-conformists, many of them Quakers, were disproportionately influential in the city's civic, social and political landscapes. By the early twentieth century the Newcastle area Monthly Meeting had some 700

² Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 114

³ See Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 140-169; for an account of Quakers in Russia see also McFadden & Gorfinkel, *Constructive Spirit*

members, with the Newcastle Meeting itself comprising of a membership of about 281 individuals.⁴ It had been run since the early nineteenth century by a group of the richest and most influential Quaker families in the town. As with Quakers everywhere, relationships of kinship were supremely important and, like Edgbaston in Birmingham, Newcastle's physical landscape was segregated by class, with its non-conformist, influential middle classes concentrated in the well to do suburbs of Jesmond and Gosforth.⁵

The Wilson family had belonged to the Society of Friends for several generations and Francesca's father, Robert, was a hatter's furrier in a family concern of considerable size, listed in the 1871 census as employing 96 men, 11 boys and 167 women. In 1883 he had married Laura Wallis, a former governess and teacher in a private school in Stafford, who came from a family of Friends in Scarborough.⁶ Robert was an influential presence in Francesca's life, it was he who encouraged her educational aspirations insisting that she attended the Central Newcastle High School for Girls, and accepted the advice of her Headmistress Miss Moberely that she take additional lessons in Greek

⁴ Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster, eds., *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History* (Chichester: Phillimore & Co. Ltd., 2001) pp 93,113-4; Ruth Sansbury, *Beyond the Blew Stone. 300 Years of Quakers in Newcastle* (Newcastle: Newcastle upon Tyne Preparative Meeting, 1998) pp 217-219. To put these figures into perspective Sansbury states that Newcastle's population had grown rapidly during the second half of the nineteenth century and by 1901 numbered over 215,000. For an account of Newcastle Quakers and Quaker women in particular see Elizabeth O'Donnell, "Woman's Rights and Woman's Duties. Quaker Women in the Nineteenth Century, with Specific Reference to the North East Monthly Meeting of Women Friends" (PhD thesis, University of Sunderland, 2000). Nationally there had been a decline in Quaker membership by 1861 when John Stevenson Rowntree estimated that membership had fallen from 16,227 in 1840 to 13,859 in 1861 after which membership stabilised, and between 1871 and 1901 increased by almost a quarter, although this in no way kept pace with the general increase in population of some 43%, figures quoted in James Walvin, *The Quakers. Money and Morals* (London: John Murray, 1997) p 137

⁵ Sansbury, *Beyond the Blew Stone*, p 189; Bill Lancaster, "Sociability and the City", in Colls & Lancaster, *Newcastle upon Tyne*, 319-40 p 332

⁶ On his death in 1933 he left just over £13,097 in his will, an equivalent spending worth of £484,343 today.

and Latin at Armstrong College to prepare for the Cambridge entrance examinations. He shared his daughter's linguistic talent and spoke French, German and Swedish. From the age of nine he had been educated in Lubeck, Germany, for three years, a tradition he continued with his own children when Francesca's sister Muriel was sent to school in Dieppe.⁷ Like many Newcastle Quakers Robert was involved in philanthropic and educational activities in the city; he taught at a Friends' adult education school and undertook philanthropic work for the local workhouse, orphanage, and for the blind.⁸ Later in life Francesca recalled the annual tea her mother gave to Robert's adult scholars, 'working men with Geordie accents and an uncouth way of eating', and how tiresome she and her siblings found this event, concluding that: 'We were nasty little snobs'.⁹

She recalled Robert as an 'unworldly' but affectionate father whose strict Quaker faith didn't prevent him from having a sense of humour, on one occasion observing Francesca's sisters at play he 'chuckled gaily when he overheard Muriel saying to Frida "Now I'll be Jesus and you be God"'.¹⁰ He was a 'humdrum, conservative Quaker' who never engaged with the modernising of Quakerism in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹¹ He had 'expressive dark eyes and great tenderness', and Francesca later recalled

⁷ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, pp 44, 16, 93-4

⁸ See Sansbury, *Beyond the Blew Stone*, pp 192-216 for the philanthropic and educational activities of Newcastle Quakers. For general accounts of Quaker involvement in education and philanthropy in the nineteenth century see Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971)

⁹ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 43

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p 41

¹¹ For an account of Quaker beliefs and practices and how they have developed over time see Pink Dandelion, *The Quakers, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Thomas C. Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860-1920: The Transformation of a Religious Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)

that the only thing he believed in passionately was the wickedness of war; he was 'passionately pro-Boer' and later disbelieving of reports of German atrocities during the First World War. She concluded that: 'Pacifism and international friendship were father's real religion'.¹² The family's Quaker background was a significant factor in this internationalist outlook, and members of the Society of Friends have a long history of activism in international affairs from the late seventeenth century.¹³ Robert was not the only member of the family to interest themselves in international causes, her Aunt Priscilla, her mother's sister and wife of George Rowntree, sewed for the Armenians when Francesca was a child and her Uncle Albert had two daughters who served with the Friends in France during and after the First World War.¹⁴

Francesca's memories of her childhood in Newcastle are of a materially comfortable, but religiously austere, middle class upbringing with a succession of nursery governesses, first at 5 South Parade and then at Lynwood Avenue.

¹² Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, pp 1, 41-44. Francesca wrote that the only time she ever saw her father angry when when the governess got the children to decorate the breakfast room to celebrate Mafeking with flags and pictures and he threw the flags and pictures into the fire. Quakers have long been associated with pacifism, for an account of the development of the witness for peace particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century see Hirst, *The Quakers in Peace and War*, and Thomas C. Kennedy, 'The Quaker Renaissance and the Origins of the Modern British Peace Movement, 1895-1920', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 16, no. 3 (1984) pp 243-272.

¹³ In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries Friends assisted religious groups in Europe who shared similar beliefs. Later in the eighteenth century members were instrumental in the campaigns against the global slave trade and this tradition continued in the early nineteenth century alongside relief missions in Germany, Greece, Ireland and elsewhere. See Greenwood, *Friends and Relief*. For the international networks of Quaker women in particular, see Holton, "Kinship and Friendship"; Holton, *Quaker Women*; Sandra Holton & Robert J. Holton, "From the Particular to the Global: Some Empirical, Epistemological and Methodological Aspects of Microhistory With Regard to a Women's Rights Network", in Karen Fricker & Ronit Lentin, eds., *Performing Global Networks* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007) pp 8-24

¹⁴ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, pp 8, 77. Albert trained in medicine in Edinburgh, studied in Paris and Vienna, and also visited clinics in Berlin and St. Petersburg.

The family's standing with the local 'Quaker aristocracy' was damaged in 1892 when her mother Laura converted from the Society of Friends to the Plymouth Brethren under the influence of the then nursery governess, the 'severe but kind' Miss Joyce. This 'cataclysm' was a terrible blow to Robert, who initially decided that their marriage was over, but subsequently relented and allowed Laura to take the children with her to Brethren meetings.¹⁵ To appreciate the enormity of this decision for him personally, and for the family's social and religious standing within their community, it should be remembered that until 1860 Quakers were still customarily disowned by their meeting for 'marrying-out'.¹⁶ It was also problematic for Francesca. She recalled being baptised in an 'extremely embarrassing' Brethren ceremony at the public baths at the age of 12, but never felt as much at home in the faith as her sisters did.¹⁷ Two of the Brethren had doubts about baptising her, and felt it should be delayed until they could be convinced that she was soundly converted to God, but her mother who was an influential presence in their meeting was so hurt by the suggestion that they gave in.¹⁸ She recalled an adolescence 'trying to be a believer but corroded by doubt' and felt that the widening of her horizons by attending school had distanced her from the other members of her deeply religious family. The impression given in her later autobiographical account is of a difficult relationship with her mother in particular, and with one of her sisters who as an adolescent was also devoutly religious:

School had created an absolute breach between me and my parents and with Frida too. Staunch in the faith, she had become remoter than ever

¹⁵ Ibid., pp 3-7

¹⁶ Dandelion, *The Quakers*, p 34

¹⁷ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 13

¹⁸ Ibid.

and occasionally we had painful quarrels. I couldn't talk to my parents about anything. I knew that I was selfish and unkind. Muriel told me that father complained that I wasn't nice to him any more. Even Maurice rebuked me. When father tried to talk to me I sidled away. Homework, pretended or real was my alibi. With mother I felt guilt. I was terrified that she would see into my heart and know that I was no longer an unquestioning believer.¹⁹

Newnham provided Francesca with an escape. She went up in 1906 at the age of 18 and later recalled how 'coming from a narrow puritanical background, this larger world opened new horizons'.²⁰ By 1906 women's education in Cambridge was still a relatively recent development; Newnham had only been in existence for some 35 years, founded in 1871 two years after its sister college Girton.²¹ The numbers of women attending were small, restricted by the attitudes of society at large, and by that of their families.²² The cost of around £100 per annum inevitably resulted in the staunchly middle class demography of the colleges.²³ Academically Newnham was a disappointment for Francesca; despite the fact that literature was her passion, she opted to read history in the hope that 'instead of a corner of the world, the whole world would be at my feet'.²⁴ However, she found the teaching at Cambridge dull

¹⁹ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 16. Her education at Newnham, as the only member of the family to receive a university education, probably added to this distance although she was very close to her brother Maurice, until an estrangement whilst they were undertaking relief work for the Serbian Relief Fund.

²⁰ Francesca M. Wilson, "Friendships" in Ann Phillips, ed., *A Newnham Anthology* (Cambridge: Newnham College, Cambridge University Press, 1979) 65-9 p 66

²¹ For a history of the Cambridge women's colleges see Rita McWilliams-Tullberg, *Women at Cambridge: A Men's University - Though of a Mixed Type* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1975)

²² Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1988) pp 127-8, 137, 176. Vicinus quotes an 1897 study of the numbers of women in British universities by the Women's Institute which specifies 166 at Newnham, with a further 109 at Girton from a national total of 784; another study estimated that before 1910 only 5% of girls educated in Girls High Schools went on to a University education, see Penny Summerfield, "Women and the Professional Labour Market 1900-1950: The Case of the Secondary Schoolmistress", in Penny Summerfield, ed., *Women, Education and the Professions*, Occasional Publications no. 8 (History of Education Society, 1987) 37-52 p 43

²³ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p 123; D. Thacker recalled paying fees of between £30-35 per term at Newnham in 1909, Phillips, *A Newnham Anthology*, p 79

²⁴ Wilson, "Friendships", pp 65-6

and uninspiring particularly that of 'the learned little Miss Gardner' who shuffled about 'in her felt slippers and shapeless gown without leaving any historical impression except the cruel concept of a "blue-stockings"'; for Francesca the 'waters of learning were bitter'.²⁵

Francesca's memoir of her time at Newnham, published in an anthology of writings by former students in 1979, is aptly entitled *Friendships*. Her first six months were the 'unhappiest' of her life thus far. She felt very much the outsider looking on at an 'elite' and later recalled: 'I had been lonely at school and at home but I was infinitely lonelier here'.²⁶ It was her fellow students who provided her with an education, drawing her into a fashionable set of young women including Jessie Cameron, whose 'proposal' to Francesca gave her 'status'; Marjorie Leon (later Vernon), the Jewish daughter of a London County Councillor who took Francesca to her first two plays, instructed her in politics and later worked with her in Vienna in 1922; the distant 'goddess' Ka Cox, flamboyant Neo-Pagan and partner of Rupert Brooke; the scientist Margot Hume who also worked with Francesca in Vienna; Lyndall Schreiner, niece of Olive; and, one of Francesca's closest friends Dorothea Osmaston (Osmy), later Lady Layton and activist for suffrage, refugees, the Liberal Party and the League of Nations.²⁷ She attended reading parties and meetings of the Fabian, Philosophical and Political Societies where she heard Amber Reeves and

²⁵ Ibid., p 66; Alice Gardner was Newnham's first lecturer in history described by Vicinus, drawing on Francesca's memoir, as 'notorious' for her dull teaching, Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p 151

²⁶ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 95

²⁷ Wilson, "Friendships", pp 66-7; Horder *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, pp 96-100. To 'propose' was to request permission to use one's first name. Osmy married the Cambridge Don, Walter Layton, see Mark Pottle, "Layton, Eleanor Dorothea, Lady Layton (1887-1959)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/75169> [Accessed 4 March 2005]

Bernard Shaw; she daydreamed about fellow Quaker Philip Noel Baker, who had been a school fellow of her brother Maurice at Bootham School, York, and with whom she read Ibsen and went skating on the Fens.²⁸ Despite recording that she was converted to suffrage by the 'glamorous' Ray Costello, and giving a speech to the political society on infant mortality, she described herself in this period as having 'little social conscience' and knowing 'nothing of the movements of the modern world'.²⁹

The theme of the importance of female friendship is one to which she returns time and time again. She later described the particular joy in the intensity of female friendship: 'Getting to know someone whom at first we had admired from afar was an adventure: like falling in love without the passion', although she was careful to elaborate that she is not referring to 'lesbian friendships'.³⁰ Many of the friendships she made at Newnham were longstanding, and a number of the women resurface as part of her social and relief networks later in life. Despite the close supervision and continuing constraints on the women students' behaviour in this period, she experienced what Vicinus has described as the liberating effect of leaving an equally closely regulated middle class late Victorian and Edwardian home, for a more independent life in a community of other women.³¹ Like her fellow students Francesca had her own room in Old Hall. A photograph of her in her study shows a side view of a typically Edwardian-looking young woman with her hair tied up sitting at a desk in front

²⁸ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 98

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, pp 98, 102

³¹ Vicinus, *Independent Women*, pp135-47; Francesca refers to 'all the stupid regulations' which are discussed alongside other details of the women students daily life and routines in the recollections in Phillips, *A Newnham Anthology*; see also Caine's portrayal of Pernel Strachey's life at Newnham in the late 1890s based on her letters home in Barbara Caine, *Bombay to Bloomsbury. A Biography of the Strachey Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) pp 124-31

of a fireplace with framed photographs, flowers and small ornaments on the fireplace, the walls decorated with framed prints, and in a pose that Hamlett has identified as typical in photographs depicting women students in their rooms in this period.³² Francesca's association with Newnham did not end in 1909; she took her MA in 1949, two years after membership of University was finally granted to women, and between 1942 and 1955 she was a Newnham Associate.³³

In 1912 she undertook the Cambridge teaching certificate and later in life maintained that teaching was a choice forced upon her by the limited career options for educated women, stating that: 'I had no particular desire to teach, no sense of vocation'.³⁴ In this of course she was far from unusual, as Oram and others have shown secondary school teaching was one of the few professions which gave university educated women relatively good prospects for pay, promotion and professional status.³⁵ Her first post teaching history, English and French at Bedales for a term was later described by Francesca as a disaster, but then she moved to Bath High School for Girls for two years between 1912 and 1914 where she was reunited with her Newnham friend Muriel Davies.³⁶ Bath was a 'Heaven after Hell,' where she experienced

³² Image reproduced in Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*; Jane Hamlett, "Nicely Feminine, Yet Learned: Student Rooms at Royal Holloway and the Oxford and Cambridge Colleges in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain", *Women's History Review*, 15, no. 1 (2006) pp 137-61

³³ NA, Newnham College Register Vol. 1 1871-1923 p 196; McWilliams-Tullberg, *Women at Cambridge*, p 210; McWilliams-Tullberg describes the Associates as an elected body of former students and teaching staff who played a part in the governance of the College, p 109

³⁴ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 131

³⁵ Alison Oram, *Women teachers and Feminist Politics 1900-39* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) pp 14-44; see also Summerfield, "Women and the Professional Labour Market 1900-1950", pp 37-52; Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p 177

³⁶ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 132. For information on Davies see appendix one p 322.

'considerable joy in teaching and discovered a certain dramatic talent in myself'.³⁷ After Bath she moved to Gravesend County School for Girls in September 1914 where she 'began to enjoy teaching even felt a vocation for it', and where she remained until 1916 when she took up relief work.³⁸ It was almost ten years before she returned to teaching in Birmingham and it is probably no coincidence that she then obtained a post in a school where Muriel Davies had also taught. Despite feeling that 'life was at an end' on her arrival in Birmingham, she later recalled the resumption of her career in January 1925, and her time as Senior Mistress in History at Birmingham, as 'thirteen and a half years that in memory I look on with pleasure' partly because she had 'a remarkable Head Mistress'.³⁹

When Francesca took up her appointment in January 1925 as a mistress at the Edgbaston Church of England College for Girls (ECECG) at a salary of £290 a year, the school had been under the leadership of its formidable Headmistress Freda Godfrey since 1910.⁴⁰ By this time the College was a well-established private school for girls, and with King Edward VI and Edgbaston High Schools, was one of three elite girls schools in the city.⁴¹ By 1925 it had almost 400

³⁷ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 132

³⁸ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 134. The dates of Francesca's early teaching career are difficult to establish. In her autobiography she states that she was at Bedales in Summer 1911 but the 1911 census taken on the evening of 2nd and 3rd April 1911 places her in Bath. The Newnham College Register states that she obtained a Cambridge teaching certificate in 1912, was at Bath H.S. 1912-14 and Gravesend County School 1914-16.

³⁹ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 135

⁴⁰ BA&H, MS 2278, minute book, 29 October 1924, p 196; BA&H, LF48.115, Annual Report, 27 April 1925. The minute recording Francesca's appointment records that she had a second class History Tripos from Cambridge, a Cambridge teaching diploma and three and a half years teaching experience at Bath and Gravesend.

⁴¹ The school had been founded in 1885 at the instigation of John Dent Goodman and Dr. Charles Gore, later the first Bishop of Birmingham, prompted by their concern about the perceived secular outlook of the city's existing girls' schools. On 4th May 1886, the school opened at 31 Calthorpe Road, Edgbaston, in the Georgian house that still forms part of the

pupils, mainly day pupils with a smaller number of boarders, between the ages of five and 18, with the younger pupils, including a very small number of boys (seven in October 1925), housed in a Kindergarten and Preparatory Department.⁴² Godfrey was remembered by one historian of girls' education in the city as a 'dignified Edwardian figure, sweeping about Edgbaston' and was active in a number of philanthropic and women's organisations in the city.⁴³ Although under the day-to-day authority of the Headmistress, the school was governed by a Council of 21, six of whom were women including Florence Potts, née Mann, the first 'old girl' to be a member when appointed in 1910. She was very widely involved in philanthropic activities in the city, and was a leading member of the local branch of the National Council of Women (NCW) which Francesca later joined.⁴⁴

An indication of Godfrey's personality and educational philosophies can be gleaned from the text of her speeches to the annual school speech days which are reproduced in full in the school magazine. As records for the school are

school complex, with 46 pupils. See Mary Bowers, *Glimpses of the College* (Birmingham: Edgbaston Church of England College, 1985) p 9

⁴² BA&H, LF48.115, Annual Report, 16 April 1926 records an average of 390 pupils 'on the books' and 400 on the register at the time of writing.

⁴³ Janet Whitcut, *Edgbaston High School 1876-1976* ([Birmingham]: Governors of Edgbaston High School, 1976) p 88; Godfrey was educated at the city's King Edward VI High School for Girls, see Winifred I. Vardy, *King Edward VI High School for Girls Birmingham 1883-1925* (London: Ernest Benn Limited., 1928) p 137. She subsequently attended Cheltenham Ladies College and St. Hilda's College, Oxford, before returning to Birmingham where she was History Mistress at the Birmingham Pupil Teachers' Centre from 1904-09. She remained as Head of ECEGC until 1940 when the school was closed for the duration of the war. She died on 29 March 1975 aged 96. The school reopened after the war on 23 January 1947 with 93 pupils.

⁴⁴ BA&H, MS 2278, Board of Education Inspection Report, 18-21 November 1930, p 12. Potts (1875-1965) was married to Dr. W.A. Potts, and was associated with the founding of Britain's first Infant Welfare Centre in Floodgate Street in 1905 and with Hope Lodge Home for Unmarried Mothers and their Children. A leading member of the local Parents National Educational Union and the NCW, she was also a member of the National Cinema Enquiry Committee in 1931, chaired by the then Vice Principal of Birmingham University Sir Charles Grant Robinson, which campaigned against the influence of 'unsuitable' films, particularly on children. In the early 1930s she formed an advisory council on marriage guidance alongside Dr. Herbert Gray, Mrs. E.W. Barnes and Dame Ethel Shakespeare, which with the support of Mrs. Neville Chamberlain later became the Marriage Guidance Council. See Bowers, *Glimpses of the College*, pp 182-3; obituary, *The Birmingham Post*, 9 April, 1965

sparse, the magazine is one of the key surviving primary sources for its life and ethos and, although often considered ephemeral in comparison to more formal records, in this case it offers the best glimpse into the day-to-day activities and concerns.⁴⁵ In addition to Godfrey's speech the magazine normally consists of a mixture of poetry, prose essays and cartoons by the pupils, occasional pieces by members of staff, school news, detailed sporting results and commentary, and a section devoted to the Old Girls' Guild of which the mistresses were honorary members.



Figure 5: The staff of ECECG outside the school, from the School Magazine, 1933. Francesca sitting second from right, Godfrey sitting in the middle with her dog on her knee.

⁴⁵ A number of issues have been located covering the years of Francesca's employment including one for each year usually dated March/April or Summer Term for the years 1925-7, 1930, 1933, 1935-40. BA&H has an incomplete sequence and the author has an incomplete private collection.

Godfrey's addresses to pupils and parents on Speech Day, 'the blackest and gloomiest [day] in the year', demonstrate a somewhat sardonic sense of humour and an outlook on life and education which places her firmly in the tradition of headmistresses of girls schools at the time.⁴⁶ On Francesca's first speech day in 1925, she reflected on her failure to persuade her staff 'to break this disastrous habit of matrimony' which resulted in a loss of 20% of the teaching staff during the year, before exhorting the parents to change their over-cautious approach to their daughters, and to ask more of them 'in the way of determination and effort and self control'.⁴⁷ Bemoaning the English undervaluing of education she stated her purpose for the school:

The idea of education as an opening of the eyes of the mind to things of surpassing beauty and value, the thrill of acquiring new knowledge, the widening of interests, the new joys which a wide education offers, the possibility it gives of escape from the often harassing daily round - of all this, as a class, we seem almost totally ignorant...The greatest work which a school can do is to touch the imagination, to train the taste, to help on that "inner growth" which will transform the life and character...Personally, I want the children to be clever as well as good, and when I say "clever" here I mean interested in sensible things, in the things which are lovely and of good report. I want them to have ideas and opinions: their opinions will often be crude. They will usually, such is the nature of youth, be exactly opposed to those of their parents. Young people, an old man once said tend to think strongly and wrongly on all subjects, but how much better to think strongly and wrongly that never to think at all. I want these children, as they grow older, to prefer the Repertory to a Picture House, the Stratford Festival to Musical Comedy; I want them to read Joseph Conrad rather than Ethel Dell, to find beauty in Walter de la Mare rather than in Ella Wheeler Wilcox.⁴⁸

In Godfrey's opinion all this depended on training and atmosphere, a 'wise mother', and parental encouragement. It is a theme to which she often

⁴⁶ ECECG *School Magazine*, 1925 p 3. On the similarity of her views to the prevalent trends in girls schools in the period see Nonita Glenday & Mary Price, *Reluctant Revolutionaries. A Century of Headmistresses 1874-1974* (London: Pitman Publishing, 1974)

⁴⁷ ECECG *School Magazine*, 1925 p 3-5

⁴⁸ Ibid.

returned in subsequent years, stressing the need for girls to have the required training to provide them with values and a philosophy of life, to provide an outlet for self-expression, and to equip them for an occupation, for potential motherhood, and for wider service to others. This service ideal is reflected in the girls' descriptions of their activities in the magazine; they maintained a cot at the children's hospital, collected for the Children's Country Holiday Fund, raised money and gave entertainments for St Asaph's School (the 'poor school' which they had adopted), and went on educational visits - to the Birmingham Settlement where one of the teachers' sister was Warden, and to the slums to see improvements made by the COPEC Society to back to back housing.⁴⁹

The magazine also throws light on Francesca's contribution to school life. In the 1926 issue she contributed a piece entitled *Vienna - An Impression*, a very similar piece to one she wrote for *The Manchester Guardian*.⁵⁰ In her speech day address in 1937 Godfrey mentioned the staff play held a fortnight earlier and lamented that: 'I cannot see Miss Wilson as Miss Wilson - she is just that hideous little Chinese murderer'.⁵¹ The girls' account of the performance of *Ambrose Applejohn's Adventure* elaborated on how Miss Evans and Miss Wilson as the thieves 'considerably enlightened us to the language occasionally (?) [sic] used by the Staff [sic]' and that 'Miss Wilson was very good as the Chinese cut-throat'.⁵² We also see her taking the girls on school outings - to Baggeridge Colliery at Sedgley, on Saturday 19th November 1933 to view the most 'up-to-date' equipment of any colliery in the West Midlands

⁴⁹ See for example *ECECG School Magazine*, 1925 pp 2, 17; 1927 p 14; 1935 p10

⁵⁰ *ECECG School Magazine*, 1926 pp 6-7

⁵¹ *ECECG School Magazine*, 1937 p 20

⁵² *ECECG School Magazine*, 1937 p 26

where they descend 2,000 feet into the colliery with Davy lamps; and a visit arranged by Francesca for a party of prefects to Lichfield with members of King Edward's Boys School History Society and Mr Macmaster, one of her lodgers where they visit the Cathedral, the old Friary and Dr. Johnson's house.⁵³ She also organised joint debates with the boys of King Edwards, for example in 1936 on the subject 'Birmingham no longer deserves the motto "Forward"', and in 1937 she chaired the annual debate on the motion 'This House is sick of England'.⁵⁴ The 1939 debate held on March 6th on 'Tradition Fetters Progress' reflected the preoccupations of the time, and saw Francesca argue that the Nazis had gone back to the past to justify the present.⁵⁵

In these activities she was consciously attempting to broaden the girls' horizons, and summarising her career at Edgbaston in later years she wrote:

Looking back on my teaching experience, I realise how much better it could have been. I spent a great deal of time preparing my lessons - and history is very exacting - and was reasonably lively in my account of it. I usually had a reasonably good response from my pupils, but I felt that I should have taken far greater interest in them. I naturally enjoyed the intelligent ones and was somewhat chagrined that the stupid always showed particular affection for me, but I didn't really understand them as I should have done. I did make certain innovations. I thought the atmosphere at school too feminine, and arranged debates with the boys of King Edward's School, and joint historical expeditions to country houses and churches in Worcestershire and Warwick. I sometimes invited the debaters to my house to discuss their subjects.⁵⁶

Another means by which she tried to broaden horizons was by bringing her Russian and German refugees into the school, and the 1936 magazine

⁵³ ECECG *School Magazine*, 1933 pp 9-10; 1935 p 11

⁵⁴ ECECG *School Magazine*, 1936 p 30, 1937 p 27

⁵⁵ ECECG *School Magazine*, 1939 p 30

⁵⁶ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 135

describes a visit by Francesca's Parisian émigré friend Sonia Zernov and 'Princess Irina' on March 5th to make an appeal for the Russian refugees in Paris.⁵⁷ The following year the magazine duly records the holding of a Russian bazaar as a result of the visit which raised £100 for the cause.⁵⁸ She arranged for her friend Helen Grant, of whom more shortly, to lecture to the girls on the situation in Civil War Spain, and she herself would talk about her Spanish experiences on her return from Murcia. Freda Godfrey in her speech day address in 1938 described the benefits of such insights:

We are trying to make the School a little less insular, and to interest them in countries besides their own. Miss Wilson's long visit to Spain has been a loss in some ways, but a stimulus in others. None of us is likely to forget the address she gave to the School in July, and the troubles of Spain are far more real to us when we hear directly of her work there. Nothing appears to daunt her. It seems to have taken her about a week to learn to speak Spanish. She first organised a hospital, and, later, a convalescent home; she has started workshops, and even factories. At the moment she is enthusiastically setting on foot a farm colony, but she really has given me a definite promise that she will leave her ducks and cabbages at Christmas, and be ready to teach history here in January.⁵⁹

This was not the only occasion on which Miss Wilson's exciting adventures were reported in the school magazine, an anecdote about her alleged pressing into service of a passing British Navy destroyer delighted Godfrey so much that it featured in the school's annual speech-day report:

Miss Wilson's habit of spending every holiday in Spain, organizing relief works, gives us a special, almost a personal interest. Her adventures, recounted every term to the School, add romance to our humdrum life. She now travels to and fro in cruisers or destroyers. She is the only person I have ever met who describes a destroyer as "cosy" – but

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 135; *ECECG School Magazine*, 1936 p 29

⁵⁸ *ECECG School Magazine*, 1937 p 24

⁵⁹ *ECECG School Magazine*, 1938 p 18

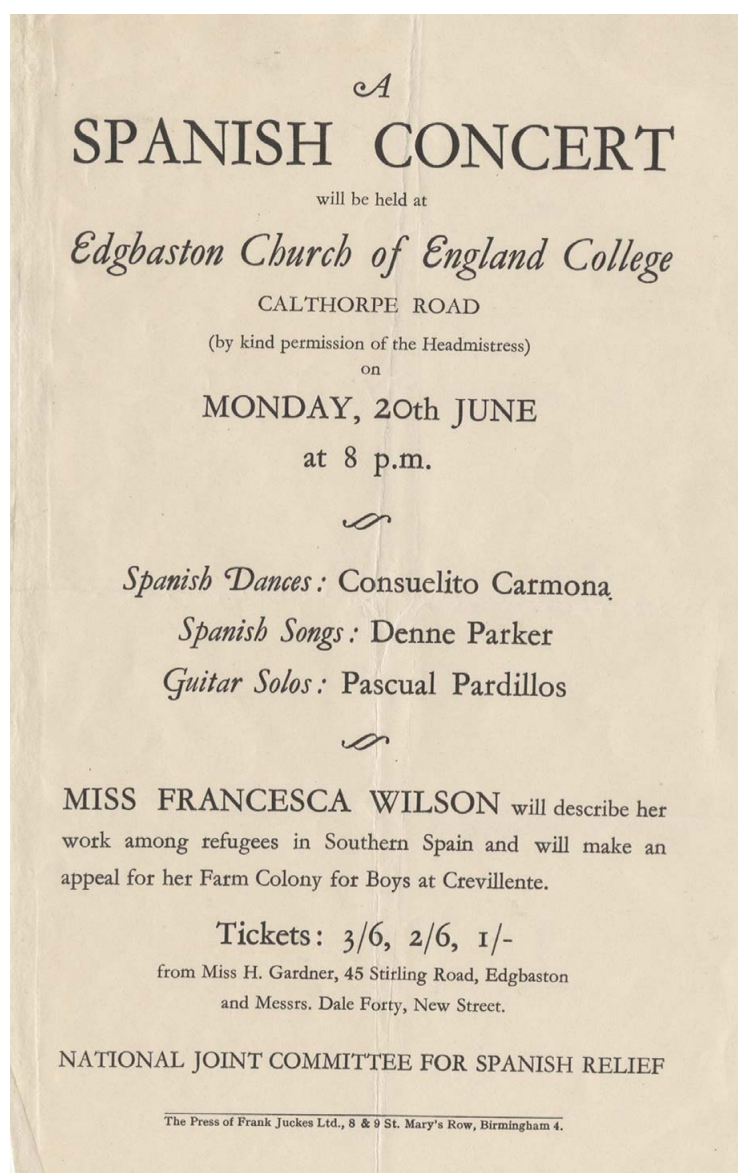


Figure 6: Notice of a fundraising lecture by Francesca at the ECEGC, 1938, BA&H, Acc 2008/51

perhaps that was because its captain gallantly gave up his cabin to her. Even Miss Wilson, however, must not go too far. She asked an English Consul in one of the southern ports whether her cruiser would be likely to pick her up on Tuesday, and received the crushing reply: "The British Navy, Miss Wilson, is not a 'bus'."⁶⁰

⁶⁰ ECEGC School Magazine, 1939 p 18

Other entries written by the girls describe their admiration for her activities and how they 'secretly longed' that she might take them with her, all of which had a beneficial effect as they raised money and gifts for the children in her colonies.⁶¹ Godfrey expressed the view that the 'wider the contacts our children can make, the more hope for the future' reflecting the increasing interest in international issues in girls schools in the interwar period.⁶² The school also had exchange of pupils with Canada, and welcomed their first African student, presumably the Miss Nontando Jabavu who participated in the annual debate that year with King Edward's Boys.⁶³

Francesca wasn't the only member of staff to befriend refugees. In October 1933 the school Council had agreed to the request of Miss Sturge of Hagley Road to assist a 20 year old German girl who after studying medicine in Germany for a year had been 'more or less driven out of that country', and who was given free dinners twice a week in return for German conversation lessons.⁶⁴ A little later Godfrey reported that she had some difficulty in making arrangements for coaching the girls in German and wished to engage Fraulein Katzenstein aged 23 who had recently come to Britain but as Home Office regulations prevented any payment being made Godfrey had arranged that the College would pay a fee of £12 12s 'plus incidentals' for a six month typing course for Fr. Katzenstein in lieu of payment.⁶⁵ Similarly on 20 November

⁶¹ ECECG *School Magazine*, 1938 p 30. Francesca reported that she returned to Spain at Christmas 1938 with some 400 gifts from the girls at her school, Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 215

⁶² ECECG *School Magazine*, 1938 p 19

⁶³ ECECG *School Magazine*, 1938 p 31

⁶⁴ BA&H, MS 2278, minute book, 25 October 1933, p 260

⁶⁵ BA&H, MS 2278, minute book, 31 October 1934, p 292. It was later recorded in 17 December 1934 that the fees in respect of Fr. Katzenstein's training between September 1934 and July 1935 had been paid, minute book, 17 December, 1934, p 308

1934 Godfrey reported that they had a German refugee who they were boarding and educating free of charge. Her parents wished her to stay on the following term but could not afford to pay the full fees and Godfrey suggested to Council that only half fees be requested as 'it was a good thing to have these foreigners, who broadened the outlook of the other children,' mentioning that they also had Russian refugees (Francesca's adopted daughters), and a Chinese girl in recent years. The Council agreed.⁶⁶ In December 1938 the Council heard that Miss Knott, among other mistresses, had interested herself in the welfare of two Jewish children aged 10 and 15 whose father was a Doctor of Economics in Frankfurt, and who were hoping to get into Britain shortly. Again, the Council approved her plan to educate the children in return for the staff paying their boarding fees.⁶⁷

Bowers in her history of the school, stated that Francesca was remembered as 'a character' and 'a great champion of troubled peoples', who taught European History 1815-1914 by making the past 'more vivid by using her vast collection of Punch cartoons in history lessons'.⁶⁸ In addition to the use of cartoons, Francesca recalled that she also dramatised history and acted the results, a teaching method which she thought unusual and innovative for the time. With the younger children she would encourage them to write illustrated autobiographies. Although no documents recording her lessons are known to survive, a snapshot of the academic life of the school is given in a Board of

⁶⁶ BA&H, MS 2278, minute book, 20 November, 1934, p 298

⁶⁷ BA&H, MS 2278, minute book, 19 December, 1938, p 545-6

⁶⁸ Bowers, *Glimpses of the College*, p 108. Francesca recalled returning to the school years later as a guest of the Old Girls when she was 'chagrined to find from their speeches that I was considered a joke, always in a flap because I was late for prayers or had lost something essential', see Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 135

Education inspection report from November 1930.⁶⁹ At the time of the inspection the school comprised of 395 pupils, including 85 girls and 14 boys in the preparatory department. The majority, 228 girls, were between 11 and 16, 28 were under 11 and the remaining 40 over 16 years of age. In the previous three years 10 girls had gone to University and five to training colleges, and the report recorded that rather more than 50% of the girls went on to 'take up professional work of some kind' on leaving.⁷⁰ In addition to the Headmistress the school had 27 full time mistresses and two visiting mistresses; eight of the staff were Froebel trained and the other 19 'well qualified' with 'no one really weak'.⁷¹ The standard of attainment in English, History, Geography and Latin were all 'good' and although the inspectors noted that on the whole the 'general intelligence' of all classes was good and that the school did 'really well for the less intellectual girl', they felt that for abler girls 'there might be more drive on the part of the teaching staff and a quicker pace in covering the ground'.⁷² The report was particularly complimentary to the History staff, recording that the school was 'very strongly staffed for this subject, as there are three Mistresses who have History degrees' going on to note that:

Two of these share the working the Middle and Upper School, and the third takes several of the Forms. Of the first two one was noticeable for arranging her work so as to secure the maximum amount of response from her pupils, and the other for careful and conscientious groundwork. The third was seen to advantage in an attractive lesson to one of the Fourth Forms.

The syllabus provides for a general survey of English history lasting for three years and varying slightly in parallel Forms, followed by the study of the last century in the Fifth and "Oxford" Forms. In the Sixth Form recent

⁶⁹ BA&H, MS 2278, Board of Education Inspection Report, 18-21 November 1930, this was the first formal inspection the school had received since 1921.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p 2

⁷¹ Ibid., p 3

⁷² Ibid., p 4

English history and a wider period of European history are taken. There is also a two years' course of Classical history for those girls who do not take Latin. The subject matter of this is on the whole literary rather than historical, but the course appears to have considerable cultural value.

A creditable standard of knowledge was displayed in all the lessons heard, and the girls displayed real interest in the work they were doing. The written work was good, and special mention may be made of books of historical chronicles kept by some of the younger girls. In most Forms two text-books are in use, and advantage is taken of this fact in various ways. Debates on historical subjects are frequently held, and there is regular practice in the business of making notes. Altogether the subject is in capable hands and is well organised.⁷³

The Senior History Mistress also assisted with English and gave 'very useful assistance in various parts of the School'.⁷⁴ In addition to English and history the girls studied geography, French, German, Latin, mathematics, science, arts and crafts, music and physical education. The report also drew attention to the school's philanthropic activities, which include befriending 'poor' schools and maintaining a cot at the children's hospital. General comments summed up the school as having 'a happy corporate spirit...good order, and very considerate manners'. In conclusion it was described as 'a good school doing sound and systematic work'.⁷⁵

Having previously lived as a teacher in lodging houses Francesca had no desire to do this in Birmingham, wanting 'a freer life...than in lodgings with sour landladies'.⁷⁶ As a result she bought the lease of 35 Duchess Road, 'an old rambling Victorian house' a short walk away from the school in Edgbaston but, as she later recalled to her great nephew, on the 'wrong side' of the Hagley

⁷³ Ibid., pp 5-6

⁷⁴ Ibid., p 5

⁷⁵ Ibid., p11

⁷⁶ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 113; in the 1911 Census Francesca is listed with nine other individuals, including one domestic servant, at 8 Upper Church Street, Bath.



Figure 7: 35 Duchess Road, in centre of image, BA&H, BCC photographs

Road.⁷⁷ As we have seen, in her later autobiographical writings Francesca described the time of her move to Birmingham as an unhappy and lonely period in her life: ‘It was when I came back to teaching after eight years of exciting experience “doing relief work”...that I felt the cruel void of a bachelor-

⁷⁷ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure* p 113. Interview by the author with William Horder, 30 November 2006. This refers to the fact that it lay on the Ladywood side rather than the more affluent Edgbaston side of Hagley Road. The houses in Duchess Road were demolished c. 1961 to be replaced by modern housing.

woman's life'.⁷⁸ Part of the reason for this sadness was the failure of a love affair on which she appears to have embarked when undertaking relief work with Serbs in Bizerta, and in her later autobiography she maintained that she had recently separated from a lover, with whom she had lived in secret, and needed a distraction 'to wean me out of myself and my bitterness'.⁷⁹ She also maintained that what she had really wanted was to get married and have children like some of her Newnham friends, but reflected that:

My affairs were all with foreigners, whom it would have been disastrous to marry. In any case they tired of me sooner than I of them. I am, I think, on the whole more loving than loved. Not always, but on the whole. Probably one is richer that way, however painful at times.⁸⁰

For her first two terms in Birmingham, Marion, a friend whom she had met in Austria and her 10 year old daughter stayed with her, but this only postponed the loneliness for a short time: 'They filled a gap...They went. I was left alone'.⁸¹ She rejected the idea of moving in with one or two of her teaching colleagues explaining that:

Many teachers make a friend of one of their colleagues and live together, often in a home-like atmosphere of domesticity and shared interests. I could not do this. I had unusually kind and pleasant colleagues, tolerant of

⁷⁸ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure* p 113

⁷⁹ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 114. It is difficult to verify this fact or identify the man involved. It is probably Dr. Zec whom she met in Bizerta during the First World War and with whom she was still corresponding in 1920, see Vienna diary, 10 March 1920.

⁸⁰ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 113

⁸¹ Ibid.. She also had her recently widowed sister in law Dorothy Wilson (nee Brown, the former relief worker also known as Brankitza) and her daughters staying with her, see recollections of June Horder, Ibid., p v. Dr Horder recalled 'In my memory the house seemed, in winter weather, bare and cold, but we had a large room at the top of the house, where there was a wonderful big old rocking horse, and all our games were centred round this horse.' Maurice Wilson died in 1925.

the sort of rather freakish outsider that I was. But I did not want to share my life with any of them.⁸²

Her answer was to 'adopt' a succession of Russian émigré children.⁸³ Although the nationality of the children gives it a somewhat dramatic gloss, her solution was not as unusual as it might first appear. A number of her friends and colleagues had adopted children, and when she started teaching in Birmingham her Headmistress, Freda Godfrey, had taken in the first of two 'adopted' daughters. Francesca's friend Muriel Davies had adopted four boys, giving her in Francesca's opinion 'a home-life, enough to distract her attention from personal frustrations, to satisfy her strong maternal instinct'.⁸⁴ Francesca decided that she 'was not brave enough to adopt a child from the egg', in case it later turned 'into something gross and alien'.⁸⁵ She therefore decided to make her adoptions of a temporary nature:

I felt I wanted to see how the child was turning out, and decided to lessen the risk of adoption by making it temporary. I decided to look for children who longed for education but who were deprived by poverty of it. I could give a year or two of help to them or who knows perhaps more, perhaps several years.⁸⁶

She focused on adolescent refugees because of an earlier positive experience of taking in Belgian refugee girls when teaching in Gravesend.⁸⁷ Her choice of Russians was driven by her interest in Russia and her love of Russian literature and culture; she had undertaken famine relief in the Buzuluk area in

⁸² Ibid., p 114

⁸³ Formal adoption in the modern understanding of the word did not legally exist until 1927. There is no evidence that Francesca ever legally adopted any of the children who lived with her.

⁸⁴ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 114; see also Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p 43 on single women adopting children.

⁸⁵ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 114

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp 114-5

⁸⁷ Ibid., p 114. See also Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 1-3

1922-23 where she learnt to speak Russian.⁸⁸ During the Christmas holidays of 1926 she travelled to Paris where Sonia Zernov, an 'exceptional woman', ran a club for émigré youngsters in the Boulevard Montparnasse, and found homes and jobs for white Russians.⁸⁹ During her time in Birmingham, Francesca had eight Russians staying with her for varying lengths of time, each one 'fished out from Paris, where from time to time I wondered about like the *voleur d'enfants*' of the Supervieille story'.⁹⁰ Initially she took in adolescent girls or young women, beginning with the eighteen year old Katia Repp who stayed for a year mastering shorthand and typing before returning to Paris where she later became private secretary to the European correspondent of the New York Times.⁹¹ Katia was followed by sixteen year old Marika Chermetieff. Marika kept in touch and 30 years later showed Francesca around Rome where she was living with her husband and children.⁹² Next came Dodossia who went on to marry unhappily and later died in a mental hospital in Switzerland, to be followed by Tania, the daughter of the exiled Count Vorontzoff Dashov, who went on to study at St Hilda's.⁹³ All the girls attended lessons at the ECECG without charge in return for giving conversation lessons in French.

⁸⁸ This interest in Russia was maintained throughout her life and her last published book was an anthology of travellers' writings on Russia, Wilson, *Muscovy: Russia Through Foreign Eyes*

⁸⁹ Paris was a centre for Russian émigrés in this period, see James E. Hassell, "Russian Refugees in France and the United States between the World Wars", *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, 81, no. 7 (1991) pp i-96 [online] <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1006535> [Accessed 5 June 2009]

⁹⁰ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 116-7. This is a reference to Jules Supervielle's 1926 novel *Le Voleur d'Enfants* (The Kidnapper).

⁹¹ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 116

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., pp 117-8. Dodossia's surname is not recorded.

However, it was with the boys that Francesca had the closest relationships. 'Sim' Simonides had spent some time in a Jesuit school in Strasbourg until his mother could no longer afford the fees, and he lived in Paris doing odd jobs before going to live with Francesca in Duchess Road. Her niece described his relationship with Francesca as rather difficult at times, partly due to his character - warm and exuberant but also 'moody, wracked by philosophical and religious doubts, always searching for an answer, and never it seemed at peace'.⁹⁴ He and Francesca kept in touch after he left Birmingham; she visited him on the French smallholding where he lived during the Second World War and later in Paris. After the war he visited her in London when he worked for Trans World Airlines. He later married Francesca's neighbour in Walberswick where she had a cottage in the later years of her life.⁹⁵

The boy that Francesca writes about most is Misha Sokolov, later known as Micheal [sic] Sokolov Grant. He was younger than her other 'adoptees' when he arrived in Birmingham.⁹⁶ She had learnt of him, his two brothers and little sister through Sonia Zernov and travelled to Paris to meet them. His two brothers, Alexander and Igor, were in a Lycee but Misha, then aged 11, and his sister Moura were in a Russian 'Colonie d'enfants' in Montmorency. Francesca recalled her first meeting with him:

Misha captivated me at once. He was small and thin, puckish, eager, with swift expressive movements and, when I suggested he might come some day for a holiday in England, a sudden dazzling smile. He was thirsty for

⁹⁴ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, part II, recollections of Annette Tolson, p 2

⁹⁵ Ibid. Sim is referred to as Ivan in Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 233-5

⁹⁶ BA&H, L48.111 *King Edward's School, Birmingham, 'Blue Book'*, 1937 lists M. Sokolov and gives his date of birth as 2 December 1923, Francesca is recorded as 'parent'.

adventure. I did not dare at first to suggest anything but a holiday. I had never taken anyone so young. How should I educate him? King Edward's was the only good boys' school I knew of in Birmingham. Would I ever get him in? He had not Sim's Jesuit college experience - just some Russian teaching and French in an *ecole primaire* in Montmorency. But I couldn't get him out of my thoughts.⁹⁷

She invited the three boys to spend the summer with her in Birmingham, and in a desperate attempt to entertain them also took a cottage on the Sudeley Castle estate in Winchcombe in the Cotswolds.⁹⁸ The holiday was a success. Misha was slow to learn English and initially 'all he learned was "You quickly" when I went off somewhere'.⁹⁹ Her Russian friend Bachtin, who was living with her at the time and staying at the cottage, and of whom more later, noticing the 'you quicklys' convinced her of Misha attachment to her and encouraged her to take him to live with her, despite her misgivings about his age. His brothers returned to their school in France. One of her lodgers at the time Max Reece was a teacher at King Edwards Boys School and although she worried that he might not appreciate her having 'planted on him this small creature in shorts, to take him to school with him in the morning', he obviously got on well with Misha.¹⁰⁰ In fact Francesca later realised that he was 'delighted to have a fag. Misha fetched and carried for him, made his toast, brought him his tea and as a reward Reece played a balloon game with him every evening, with elaborate rules which they both invented', ruining her carpets and furniture in the process.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 119

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 120-1

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p 122

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p 123

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p 123

Misha spent two years at King Edwards and a further two years on the naval training ship HMS Conway.¹⁰² She was obviously very fond of him and wrote that she never remembered getting angry with him: 'There were no "don'ts" in our relationship, no rebukes or storms. He gave me great pleasure and amusement'.¹⁰³ Her absences in Spain from 1937 were a problem, although her house at the time was always occupied by a housekeeper and a number of lodgers. During holidays Muriel Davies would often take Francesca's 'protégés' to stay with her own adopted family in Streatham, and at one point when she was in Spain in 1937 Francesca sent him to the Bruderhof, a group of Christian communists who had fled from Germany when Hitler announced conscription and settled near Cirencester.¹⁰⁴ The community was run on similar lines to a kibbutz and she realised that it was too hard for a young boy. So Misha went to stay with the Barringtons, an aristocratic Anglo-Russian family with whom the Sokolov boys had spent a few holidays, at their home in Suffolk. When Francesca returned from Spain at the end of the Christmas holidays in 1938 she realised 'the loss of Misha'.¹⁰⁵ He hadn't seen her for six months and he didn't turn up to meet her at New Street Station as usual. She later reflected that she knew she couldn't complain as she had neglected him for Spain; her response was to detach herself from him emotionally, although she later realised that this was a mistake.¹⁰⁶ After the Second World War when he lived for a time with her in Fellows Road, London, she said to him that she felt he had deserted her for the Barringtons; he 'growled' that he hadn't; that it was

¹⁰² Ibid., p 124

¹⁰³ Ibid., p 123

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp 126-8. Francesca knew Eberhard Arnold, the son of the founder, when he had been student in Birmingham.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p 127

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p 129

she who had deserted him. Reflecting on this she described her attitude to the children, and pondered as to its effects:

I had made up my mind beforehand to be, as far as I could detached, from them. I knew the misery of children and protégés who felt they could not give to their parents or guardians the love that was expected of them. I wanted to be unpossessive, to demand nothing. I had taken them at my own whim, because I needed them, or felt I did. I expected nothing in return. If they gave me their affection and confidence, it was a free gift - a gift I received with joy and gratitude, as an unexpected gratuity.¹⁰⁷

Misha himself wrote a fond memoir of Francesca after her death. After wondering how on earth she managed to get a non-English speaking Russian boy into an English grammar school he recalled a happy home and school life with Francesca and her lodgers, although it was the Cotswold cottage that was 'the highlight of our Birmingham lives'.¹⁰⁸ It was basic and a little primitive, and Misha recalled how one guest, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, had:

burst out to Francesca that he failed to understand what "a delicately nurtured woman can be doing in such primitive surroundings: washing stone floors, polishing oak ones, fiddling with oil lamps, making fires, bathing in cold water in a tin bath, burning yourself cooking over a fire. What are you playing at?" Francesca felt he had a point although nothing much changed!¹⁰⁹

Misha described how he was 'thoroughly won over' by Francesca's Republicanism and quite happy for her to go Spain. Francesca, he recalled, was his political hero and he would go to the cinema to boo at Pathe News footage of Franco, pore over his maps of the front lines in his Birmingham bedroom, and spend hours working out ways for her to smuggle money into

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p 124

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., part II, recollections of Misha Sokolov Grant, p 20

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p 20. The source of the quote is unknown although it may have been Francesca's diary. Wittgenstein was a friend and colleague of Bakhtin.

Spain.¹¹⁰ After a naval career during the war, in 1949 he went to stay with Helen Grant's brother, Noel, in Kent, and appears to have been 'adopted' by the family taking their surname.¹¹¹ In the early 1950s he married the journalist, and author of two influential books on Czechoslovakia in the 1930s and 40s, Sheila Grant Duff and they farmed considerable holdings in England and Ireland until his death in 1998.¹¹²

Francesca's interest in all things Russian was also manifested in her connections with Russian academics at the University of Birmingham. In October 1928 *The University Gazette* published a letter from her in her capacity as Honorary Secretary of the Birmingham Slavonic Society publicising the fact that the society had been newly formed that autumn to promote the study of Slavonic Studies.¹¹³ The President was Serge Konovalov, Professor of Russian Language and Literature at the University of Birmingham.¹¹⁴ In the spring of 1928 Francesca was in Paris with Konovalov who wanted her to meet

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p 21

¹¹¹ Ibid., p 23

¹¹² Obituaries for Sheila Grant Duff in *The Guardian*, 3 April 2004 and *The Independent*, 12 April 2004

¹¹³ *The University Gazette*, 5, no 1, October 1928, p 39. Prof Sir Bernard Pares of the London School of Slavonic studies, H.C. Field, formerly President of the Anglo-Russian Society in Birmingham, Alfred Hayes of the Birmingham and Midland Institute, and Prof. Raymond Beazley of Birmingham University were Vice-Presidents

¹¹⁴ His chair was founded and endowed by the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce. Konovalov also ran the Bureau of Research on Russian Economic Conditions, formed in 1931 to publish research and advise local businesses on trade with the USSR, see Eric Ives, Diane Drummond & Leonard Schwarz, *The First Civic University: Birmingham 1880-1980. An Introductory History* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2000) pp 198, 201, 284. It is not known how Francesca and Konovalov first met but on 4 December 1929 he addressed a joint meeting of the Slavonic and International Societies on the difficulties of émigré Russians after 1922 entitled 'The Russian in Exile', a subject that was close to Francesca's heart, see *The Birmingham Mail*, 5 December 1929, p 8; *The University Gazette*, 6, no. 3 January 1930, p 81. He was later described in *The Birmingham Gazette*, 29 November 1932 as 'an uncompromising opponent of the communist regime' and in 1934 the local press reported that Rosenholz, the Russian Soviet Commissar for Trade had described the Birmingham Bureau in a speech given in Moscow as 'a gang of bloody White guards', see *Birmingham Evening Despatch*, 12 February 1934, and *The Birmingham Gazette*, 13 February, for Konovalov's response defending the academic impartiality of the Bureau.

a man he considered to be ‘the most brilliant man of the Russian émigration, a scholar and a philosopher’, and whom Konovalov wanted her to invite to England for a period of study and to ‘add lustre’ to their Slavonic Society.¹¹⁵ As Francesca waited for Konovalov to appear from ‘the dark stairway of a dilapidated apartment house in the Quartier Latin’ she imagined an elderly, grave Russian with a pointed beard, and was therefore surprised by the man who eventually appeared with him:

Not only did he look very young - he did not look like a philosopher. Though at the time he was pale and thin, his broad shoulders and massive frame made him look more a man of action than of thought. He had wiry fair hair that swept back from a high forehead, deep vertical lines at each side of his full lips and dark hazel eyes which at this moment were as hard as pebbles. His face worked strangely as he talked to me. Konovalov, who knew me little, had told him that I was a pious and conventional Englishwoman, whom he must on no account shock. England he was convinced was just one more blind alley - he had come to meet me in his most antagonised and antagonising mood. I felt I was tackling a fierce and hostile animal and was convinced I should never feel at ease with him.¹¹⁶

This was Bakhtin, who would become one of the most influential people in her life. Nicolai Bakhtin was born in Orel, Russia, in 1896, the son of a civil servant and member of the Russian nobility, and elder brother of the better-known and influential cultural critic Mikhail Bakhtin. After an education at the University of St. Petersburg Nicolai had enlisted as a hussar and subsequently served in the First World War and with the French Foreign Legion in North Africa where he was wounded in 1923. In 1924 he moved to Paris where he was part of a white Russian émigré intellectual circle and served on the editorial board of the

¹¹⁵ Francesca M. Wilson, “Biographical Introduction”, in Nicholas Bakhtin, *Lectures and Essays* ([Birmingham]: University of Birmingham Press, 1963) p 11, she also translated some of his writings from Russian for this publication.

¹¹⁶ UoBSC, US 5 File IV, typescript biographical portrait, pp 1-2. A revised slightly amended version of this description appears in Wilson, “Biographical Introduction”, p 11

journal *Zveno*.¹¹⁷ By the time Francesca met him four years later he was living in poverty in a 'garret lodging' on a Nansen passport.¹¹⁸ The following day, Francesca took him to the British consul to try for a visa, and during the walk there revised her opinion of him:

There is sincerity in this man, I thought, it burns in him like a white fire. He will never say anything he does not believe and what he believes he believes with a passion. He is uncompromising. He either loves or hates, accepts or scorns.¹¹⁹

Bachtin was uncomfortable with the consul who made no secret of the fact that he regarded him as an 'undesirable alien' and Francesca considered the visa unlikely to materialise, privately reflecting that this was probably for the best as she couldn't think what to do with him if he ever reached Birmingham and felt 'I should never be at home with him myself'.¹²⁰ Despite this unpromising start Bachtin obtained his visa and appeared in Duchess Road two months later:

Then suddenly one grey evening in May he turned up at my home in Birmingham, carrying in his arms a newspaper parcel - his luggage, mainly books. Sim, a Russian schoolboy who was staying with me, opened the door to him and welcomed him with the unselfconscious, spontaneous warmth that was native to him: Bachtin's apprehensions melted. All the evening he talked to us in a gay, amusing, light-hearted way. Sim and I were like instruments to be played on - we vibrated to Bachtin's exuberance, to his amazing vivacity. And the ease that I felt with him that night, the response to his gaiety, to what was quickening in his thought and intense in his loves - though at times blotted out by his evil moods - remained with me till the last time I saw him, shortly before his death twenty-two years later.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ UoBSC, US 5 File IV, typescript biographical portrait

¹¹⁸ Refugee passports issued to exiled Russians were named after their originator Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, League of Nations High Commissioner for Russian and Armenian refugees.

¹¹⁹ UoBSC, US 5 File IV, typescript biographical portrait, pp 3-4

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p 4

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp 4-5

Bachtin found life in Birmingham 'soothing' and spent hours talking and walking with Francesca and Sim; they spoke in French as Bachtin was struggling to learn English.¹²² Following his return to Paris a few weeks later, Francesca spent her school holidays with him in Paris, where she bought a flat, or on camping holidays in Europe. Francesca later recalled that her greatest concern for seven years following their initial meeting in 1928 'was how to launch Bachtin' and secure an academic position for him in England.¹²³

She bought the Paris flat on her return to that city at the end of an extended trip in 1929.¹²⁴ She travelled to the Balkans on behalf of the WILPF at the request of Hilda Clark. The WILPF had a tradition of sending investigative missions to international trouble spots and had been concerned about the post-war situation in the Balkans, and minority rights in Macedonia in particular, throughout the 1920s.¹²⁵ Francesca had longstanding relationships with a number of key women in the British and American WILPF from her days in Vienna including Clark, Pye, Courtney and Dorothy Detzer, the Secretary of the American WILPF. This was not Francesca's first contact with the WILPF, she had certainly attended at least one WILPF conference in Vienna in 1921 and written a piece intended for *The Manchester Guardian*.¹²⁶ Francesca travelled around the Balkans between April and August, tying the tour in with a

¹²² Ibid., pp 22-3

¹²³ Ibid., p 2

¹²⁴ UoBSC, US 5 File III, travel diary, 1929

¹²⁵ Bussey & Tims, *Pioneers for Peace*, pp 38, 58, 67-9

¹²⁶ Bryn Mawr College Library, Dorothy North Haskins Papers, Series 1, Box 1 folder 15, letter FMW to Dorothy North, 22 August 1922. North wrote her own account of the congress as a delegate of the American Section which was published in *The Friend*, 12 August 1921, p 529. There is also a photograph of Francesca, North, and Margaret Sackur (later Copeman) taken in 1921 at a WILPF Youth Conference in Greater Manchester Record Office, Phythian Family Papers, 2426/50

camping expedition with Bachtin to Greece.¹²⁷ At the end of her tour she produced a report, and at Clark's request travelled to the WILPF Sixth International Congress held at Prague 23rd-29th August 1929 to deliver it in person. Following her arrival in Prague she met with Clark and Courtney at congress on the first Sunday and recorded in her diary: 'Feel depressed such a crowd of women. Wish I hadn't come!'¹²⁸ She was still feeling 'rather overwhelmed' two days later.¹²⁹ At the end of the trip she met Bachtin in Paris to spend the final two or three days of her 'holiday'. On their last day she woke up 'in despair' and after wandering around with Bachtin she hit on a scheme to cheer them both up: 'I conceive suddenly plan of buying flat. We cheer up. See suitable one at 2 rue Rubens XIII & take it'.¹³⁰

She and Bachtin appear to have been romantically involved for the first year or so but their relationship subsequently evolved into an intense friendship. In 1931 she had her first meeting with Constance Pantling whom Bachtin would shortly marry. Bachtin eventually moved to Britain permanently in 1932, initially to Cambridge where he secured an academic position, then to the University of Southampton. In 1938 he moved to the University of Birmingham where he taught classics and linguistics until his death in 1950. After losing a child, Constance studied medicine and joined the Communist Party. Under her influence Bachtin also became a Communist although he struggled to toe the party line and, in Francesca's opinion, made 'an extremely bad Communist'.¹³¹

¹²⁷ UoBSC, US 5 File III, travel diary, 1929

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ UoBSC, US 5 File IV

In addition to her 'adopted' children, Bachtin, and his émigré Russian friend Guerchenkron who also stayed with her in Birmingham, Francesca took in a number of lodgers to help with her 'precarious finances', and opened her home to refugees.¹³² The lodgers included, among others, Ian MacMaster, a teacher at King Edwards Boys School, Max Reese, friend of Misha and MacMaster's replacement at King Edwards when he left for Eton, the Nobel laureate and DNA pioneer Maurice Wilkins, and the psychologist Dr. Alice Heim.¹³³ She also took in Jewish refugees from Europe including a young man named only as 'Samson' and Dr. Eva Rothmann, of whom nothing more is presently known, and probably the best known of her refugee boarders, the art historian Nikolaus Pevsner.¹³⁴

Francesca met Pevsner in Göttingen, Germany, in May 1933 when visiting her sister, Muriel, and brother in law, Pallister Barkas, who was a lecturer at the University there. Pevsner had been born in Leipzig in 1902 into a Russian-Jewish family but had converted to the Lutheran Church in 1921 and had lectured at Göttingen University since 1928.¹³⁵ By the time Francesca met him he had just been debarred from lecturing by Nazi race laws, but was still largely sympathetic to the Hitler regime. Francesca reported her meeting with him, although at that time of course he was not known in England, in an article

¹³² Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 123

¹³³ Wilkins was at Birmingham University before moving to Kings College London where he did his pioneering work with Watson, Crick and Franklin. Heim later worked at the Cambridge Unit of Applied Psychology and was later the author of *The Appraisal of Intelligence* which in 1954 was among the first publications to question the theory of fixed intelligence, see <http://www.Mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/history/electronicarchive/firsttimewar> [Accessed 10 February 2009]; Roy Lowe, "Education", in Paul Addison & Harriet Jones, eds., *A Companion to Contemporary Britain 1939-2000* (Malden & Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) p 285

¹³⁴ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 119

¹³⁵ Brian Harrison, "Pevsner, Sir Nikolaus Bernhard Leon (1902-1983)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31543> [Accessed 3 March 2005]

published in *The Birmingham Post*'s women's page on her return from Germany.¹³⁶ In the article she described the May Day pageant in Göttingen with its red, white and black flags, swastikas, and its columns of marching SA and SS men, students, public officials and tradesmen, remarking that the only absentees were women as 'Hitler wants to revive the good old Germany, in which women stayed at home, rocking cradles and obeying husbands'.¹³⁷ She contrasted this spectacle with the fate of the 'losers', the Jewish school girl 'with pale haunted face, [who] spooks round the town on her bicycle' because she was no longer allowed to study, and the Jewish academics "'requested" not to lecture'.¹³⁸ After describing the difficulties of life, and the complications and restrictions on 'flight', she dealt with the difficult situation of those individuals and families who had been assimilated as Germans for generations, 'good Germans, owning no other language, culture, home, religion or nationality' and the sympathy still felt towards them by ordinary people in 'these times of persecution', contrasting the attitude towards them with the anti-Semitism felt towards Polish Jews:

many of them poor, uneducated, half-civilised people, who, with their inborn skill as money-changers, made their fortunes during the inflation period and earned their unpopularity by their noisy *nouveau riche* airs and still more by being mixed up in all sorts of corruption scandals and swindles.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Francesca M. Wilson, "A German University Town. After the Celebrations of May Day", *The Birmingham Post*, 16 May 1933, p 15

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

It is in this context that she reports a conversation with a 'Privatdozent', identified as Pevsner by his biographer Stephen Games.¹⁴⁰ Francesca ended her piece with his words:

He was tall and blond - only a German with his sixth sense for a Jew would have known that he wasn't Aryan - dignified and refined, not only in appearance, but in cast of mind. "I love Germany," he said. "It is my country. I am a Nationalist, and in spite of the way I am treated, I want this movement to succeed. There is no alternative but chaos, and I cannot want my country to be plunged into civil war. There are things worse than Hitlerism; I think your Press in England does not realise that. And there is much idealism in the movement. There are many things in it which I greet with enthusiasm and which I myself have preached in my writings. I consider the compulsory labour which is to start next January an excellent thing. All young men will have six months' service for the State, and no matter what their rank in life they will all work together. Hitler is planning public works on a vast scale to cure the unemployment problem, and I believe that he has the courage and will to do what he says. Then there is much that is Puritan and moral in the movement - a great drive is to be made against luxury, vice and corruption.

For fifteen years we have been humiliated by the outside Powers. No wonder that Hitler appeals to our youth when he tells them to believe in themselves again, that the future is theirs to mould, that if they are united Germany will no longer be the pariah of the world. If there had been no reparations, no invasion of the Ruhr and the Rhineland, there would have been no Hitler.¹⁴¹

Games contended that Pevsner maintained his right wing views after arriving in Britain and that had the British authorities been fully aware of his leanings he may not have been treated as sympathetically, but as he was a modernist and was supported by the Academic Assistance Council and Birmingham Quakers, presumably through Francesca's good offices, he was assumed to be an opponent of the regime.¹⁴² Be that as it may, in late 1933 Pevsner arrived in England and was awarded a two-year fellowship in the Department of

¹⁴⁰ See Stephen Games, *Pevsner on Art and Architecture: The Radio Talks* (London: Methuen, 2003)

¹⁴¹ Wilson, "A German University Town", p 15

¹⁴² Games, *Pevsner on Art and Architecture*, pp xxiv-xxv

Commerce at Birmingham University, funded by the AAC and local supporters, and held under the supervision of Philip Sargant Florence.¹⁴³ Another of Francesca's lodgers, Constance Braithwaite, who shared Francesca's household with Pevsner and others for about two years, later recalled:

When Pevsner came to England he did not originally move his family. Francesca Wilson asked him to stay in her house as her guest. I was at the time a lecturer in the University Social Study Department and Professor Sargant Florence (Professor of Commerce) was my chief as Chairman of the Social Study Committee. I introduced Pevsner to Florence. Florence was very interested and sympathetic and found him some research work. The comment in the University Bulletin on the "somewhat unusual situation of an art historian working in a Commerce Department" describes a situation not very strange in the circumstances of the time. There were a number of expert refugees from German and Austrian Universities. There was much sympathy for them and attempts were made to fit them into possible jobs even if those jobs were probably not what they would have entered in normal times. Pevsner spoke English very well and made easy contacts. I liked him very much and learned much from his knowledge and his attitudes. He was a European in his attitude to artistic history and he soon showed that he felt he shared our artistic heritage.¹⁴⁴

Pevsner did not fit into Francesca's household comfortably at first, it was as Games described 'a messy household' and Francesca found Pevsner too 'stiff upperlipped'.¹⁴⁵ However, after about a year she had modified her feelings and

¹⁴³ Philip Sargant Florence was Professor of Commerce at Birmingham University, 1929-55; his wife, the American born Lella Secor Florence was a journalist, author, peace campaigner and birth control activist who was later instrumental in the introduction of the oral contraceptive pill following trials in Birmingham. They moved in fashionable, leftwing, and academic circles.

¹⁴⁴ Letter 8 January 1984 from Constance Braithwaite to Christine Penney, former Head of Special Collections, University of Birmingham. Constance Braithwaite held a London BSc degree and first appears in the University Calendar for 1932-33 as Assistant Lecturer in Social Economics. I am grateful to Chris Penney for supplying me with this information and allowing me access to her files. Games, *Pevsner on Art and Architecture*, p xxii quotes a similar response from Francesca's own diary of the time, Francesca he thought: 'was intrigued by the ambiguities of his position. He was a "fair type, very refined and cultural", wrote Francesca Wilson, a Birmingham schoolteacher and refugee worker, in her diary, "a Jew but feels himself entirely German. Very nationalist in sympathy. Absurd situation for him...He had a *dringende Bitte nicht zu lesen* [urgent request not to teach]. They warned him that the students would make a row if he did"'.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Games, *Pevsner on Art and Architecture*, p xxvii. Games was allowed access to some of Francesca's diaries by her literary executor Fred Woolsey. However following a disagreement over the interpretation of a publication by Games, Woolsey withdrew his co-operation; information from Stephen Games in an e-mail to the author, 20 February 2009.

considered him to be 'water rather than wine but good water, pleasant to have every day'.¹⁴⁶ Francesca and Pevsner became friends and kept in contact with each other after they had both left Birmingham for London; in his Reith Lecture 'The Geography of Art', broadcast on Sunday 16th October 1955, for example, Pevsner referred to the fact that he had just finished reading the proofs of Francesca's book *Strange Island*, and she is one of the people to whom his *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* was dedicated 'with gratitude'.¹⁴⁷ Duchess Road was in fact a hub for refugee activity in Birmingham. In addition to Francesca at number 35, number 2 was home to Hanna Simmons and her daughter Ruth. Hanna (née Johanna Selig) had been born in Germany before marrying Bernard Simmons, a Birmingham Jewish manufacturing jeweller and settling with him in Duchess Road where from 1932 she opened her home to Jewish refugees from the continent.¹⁴⁸ Ruth also involved herself in the cause assisting with the Kindertransport, and acting as West Midlands Regional Secretary for the Refugee Children's Movement.¹⁴⁹

Given Francesca's Quaker middle class background, her education, the interests and activities of her circle of colleagues and contemporaries, and her background in relief, it might have been expected that she would become actively involved in philanthropic organisations in the city. However the only Birmingham women's organisation in which Francesca seems to have become involved during her time in the city was the International Sectional Committee

¹⁴⁶ Francesca's diary quoted in Games, *Pevsner on Art and Architecture*, p xxvii

¹⁴⁷ Reproduced in Games, *Pevsner on Art and Architecture*, p 177; Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960) frontispiece. This was a revised and partly rewritten edition of his *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*, first published by Faber and Faber in 1936.

¹⁴⁸ Zoe Josephs, *Suivivors: Jewish Refugees in Birmingham 1933-1945* (Warley: Meridian Books, 1988) pp 1-8

¹⁴⁹ Josephs, *Suivivors*; see also Oldfield, "It is Usually She", pp 64-5

of the local branch of the NCW.¹⁵⁰ Francesca is first listed as a subscriber in the Annual Report for 1932-33, when she had already been in Birmingham for over seven years, alongside her headmistress Freda Godfrey, Lella Secor Florence, the American born pacifist, birth control activist, and wife of Pevsner's supervisor Sargant Florence, Francesca's lodger Constance Braithwaite, and Jane MacMaster. Francesca may well have been introduced to the International Section by Jane MacMaster, wife of one of her former lodgers Ian MacMaster, who was Assistant Hon. Secretary to the International Section for the years 1928-31.¹⁵¹ It may have been through this contact that it was proposed by the committee on the 11th November 1931 that Francesca deliver a paper on education, and an offer from her to ask Lady Layton to speak on India was welcomed.¹⁵² The paper entitled 'Education in France' was duly delivered as part of a year's study of France on 15th March 1932 at an evening hosted by Dr. Elgood Turner, a member of the committee, and was later published in *The Birmingham Post*.¹⁵³ A few weeks later Francesca was nominated to stand for election to the committee and was elected at the annual general meeting held at Messers Kunzle's café on 14 June. At the same AGM the chair Mrs Hoskins referred to the excellence of the previous year's papers and singled out Francesca's lecture 'for its out-of-the ordinariness'.¹⁵⁴ The

¹⁵⁰ The records of the other potential local women's organisation that might have appealed to her, the Birmingham branch of the WILPF do not survive for the years 1925-39. The NCW branch's International Section was founded after the First World War by Dr Elgood Turner 'to promote, in however small a way, a better understanding of other countries', see BA&H, MS 841B/67, Annual Report, 1933-34

¹⁵¹ BA&H, MS 841B/59, Annual Report, 1928-29

¹⁵² BA&H, MS 841B/39, minutes International Sectional Committee, 11 November 1931, Lady Layton was Francesca's friend Dorothy Osmaston (Osmy) who from 1931 was Chairman of the British Women's Advisory Council on Indian Affairs, see Pottle, "Layton [nee Osmaston], Eleanor Dorothea", p 3

¹⁵³ BA&H, MS 841B/64, Annual Report, 1931-32; Francesca M. Wilson, "French Education", *The Birmingham Post*, 7 June 1933, p 13

¹⁵⁴ BA&H, MS 841B/39, minutes International Sectional Committee, 13 May and 14 June 1932

subject for the year 1932-33 was Japan and Francesca gave a paper on 'The Nō Plays' on March 9th 1933. Each meeting was attended by 35-40 members, and as well as the subjects under scrutiny an opportunity was provided at the end of each meeting to discuss 'other urgent affairs' related to the 'present International difficulties'.¹⁵⁵ As a member of the committee Francesca was in the company of women who were either influential in their own right, or the wives of the local 'great and the good'. The Committee's president was Elizabeth Cadbury, with Dr. Elgood Turner as Chairman [sic] and over the next couple of years the list of committee members and speakers reads like a roll call of the female members of the city's elite manufacturing and political middle class families.¹⁵⁶

Francesca herself proposed Central Europe as the subject of study in 1933-34 and gave two lectures, one on 'An Introduction; Austria to-day' and later in the year on "Jugo-Slavia," from her own experience', and again they were published in *The Birmingham Post*.¹⁵⁷ In addition, in January 1934 Mrs Ormerod, Honorary Liaison Officer of the International Committee of German Refugee Professional Workers, gave a 'vivid address' on 'Present Conditions and Personalities in Central Europe' to a full branch meeting, and Pevsner gave a lectured on 'Austrian Art' at the annual meeting of the International Section held at Elizabeth Cadbury's home.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ BA&H, MS 841B/65, Annual Report, 1932-33

¹⁵⁶ Including for example Mrs. Barnes, Mrs. Harrison Barrow, Mrs. Barrow Cadbury, Mrs. Bingham Hall, Mrs. Caddick, Mrs. Fairfax Crowder, Mrs. Julian Osler, Mrs. Florence Potts, Mrs. Elsie Duncan Jones, Miss Adelaide Lloyd, and Mrs. Walter Barrow.

¹⁵⁷ Francesca M. Wilson, "A Visit to Vienna. Nazis, Socialists and People of No Party", *The Birmingham Post*, 23 May 1933, p 15

¹⁵⁸ BA&H, MS 841B/39, minutes International Sectional Committee, 13 May and 14 June 1932; BA&H, MS 841B/67, Annual Report, 1933-34

The following year Francesca chaired the International Section Committee with Jane MacMaster as Hon. Secretary.¹⁵⁹ The branch Annual Report for the year reports the death of Dr. Elgood Turner, founder of the International Section, stating that: 'One thing would have given her great pleasure, Miss Francesca Wilson's Chairmanship, to which she had looked forward'.¹⁶⁰ The report went on: 'In this year of difficult international relations, the policy, begun last year, of devoting a part of each meeting to current affairs outside the special subject, was particularly valuable. Miss Wilson's wide personal knowledge of European affairs has proved of great service and she is already in demand as a lecturer for N.C.W. branches outside Birmingham'.¹⁶¹ The special subject that year was Spain, and the membership were treated to 'a brilliant lecture on Spanish Art' by Pevsner complete with lantern and epidiascope, and a lecture on Spanish literature and its part in contemporary politics by Helen Grant. Miss Silcox from Oxford spoke on 'Personal Impressions of the Revolution'.¹⁶²

Francesca continued as Chairman in 1935-36 when the subject for discussion was 'England, with special reference to Foreign Relations'. She was due to open the year's meetings with a presentation on 'England through Foreign Eyes' (part of the title of her book published twenty years later in 1955) but this was changed due to the Italian attack on Abyssinia, whereupon 'Miss Wilson gave a short summary of events leading up to the crisis' which was followed by

¹⁵⁹ BA&H, MS 841B/69, Annual Report, 1934-35

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid. The section also collaborated with the Citizenship Committee and the Federation of University Women in a meeting on India, and hosted a visit by Mrs Hamed Ali of the 'Istanbul Conference'.

a 'heated and interesting discussion' on the case for and against sanctions.¹⁶³ At a branch meeting organised by the International Section in the autumn Pevsner again gave 'an illuminating and intensely interesting' talk on 'England's Place in International Art', and Charles Roden Buxton, whom Francesca knew through the Jebb family, spoke on the 'Future of British Africa' at a meeting jointly organised with the International Section of the University.¹⁶⁴ In 1936-37 Francesca stepped down from the Chairmanship and the Committee but gave a talk to the annual meeting on 9th July 1936 on 'Recent Impressions of Germany', and as the year's subject was Scandinavia on 7 October she spoke on 'Scandinavia - A Historical Survey'.¹⁶⁵ The following year she resumed her place on the International Committee and although the special subject for the year was 'Native Races of Africa', part of several meetings were given over to the international situation.¹⁶⁶

The other organisation with which Francesca was consistently involved whilst in Birmingham was the local Society of Friends. Her attitude to religion and in particular the Quaker faith, is one of the ambiguous elements of her story in the city, and indeed in her life story generally. The evidence for her religious beliefs in later life is contradictory; although of course it may be that her religious identity, like all other identities, was simply subject to change and variation over time. We saw earlier in this chapter how her mother's conversion to the Plymouth Brethren affected Francesca and her family. On

¹⁶³ Wilson, *Strange Island*; BA&H, MS 841B/71, Annual Report, 1935-36; Francesca gave her intended talk later in the year.

¹⁶⁴ BA&H, MS 841B/71, Annual Report, 1935-36

¹⁶⁵ BA&H, MS 841B/73, Annual Report, 1936-37. At an extra meeting on 20 November Helen Grant spoke on 'Spain To-day', for information on Grant see appendix one p 324.

¹⁶⁶ BA&H, MS 841B/75, Annual Report, 1937-38

the eve of her departure for Newnham she had announced to the family that she was leaving the Brethren and returning to the Quaker fold, a fact which saddened her mother but 'secretly pleased' her father.¹⁶⁷ Although she maintains that she 'rejoined' the Friends at this point she and Maurice are listed as members alongside their father in the membership lists for Newcastle Meeting before this. In the Membership list dated First Month [January] 1905, Robert, Francesca Mary and 14 year old William Maurice are listed as 'members' whilst her mother Laura Maria, and her sisters Winifred Laura and Amy Muriel, are listed as non-members.¹⁶⁸ She is consistently listed as a member of Newcastle meeting until 1926 at which point she transferred her membership to Birmingham's George Road Meeting. She transferred her membership in March 1925 following her arrival the city and did not resign from the Meeting until December 1950.¹⁶⁹ Despite this evidence her friends and family refer to her as someone who was not a Quaker, had 'no religion', was 'agnostic', 'a-religious', and that she found it hard to accept the religious beliefs of members of her family.¹⁷⁰ In her record of her discussions with Bachtin he referred to the fact that she had 'lost the religion' which sustained her mother.¹⁷¹ There are other indications as well; she was referred to by another Quaker in Spain, for example, as a 'friend of the Friends' rather than a

¹⁶⁷ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, pp 11, 94

¹⁶⁸ FL, Lists of Members, Newcastle Monthly Meeting, 1905. One of her sisters, Amy Muriel changed her status to member from 1913. In the List of Members for Cambridge Meeting, 1908, Francesca is listed as the only Quaker student member in Newnham.

¹⁶⁹ Bull Street Meeting House, Birmingham, WNMM, minute book 30, March 1925; minute book 37 records that her letter of resignation has been received and accepted, 12 December 1950; BA&H, Lists of Members WNMM 1925-1951. At the time of research and writing the WNMM records are held at Bull Street Meeting House but are due to be transferred to BA&H in 2010

¹⁷⁰ Duncan-Jones, "Francesca Mary Wilson, 1888-1981", pp 61-3 states that during First World War Francesca 'had at that time no religion and rather despised the notion of duty... She liked to represent herself as fundamentally wayward and self-indulgent'; interview with Elizabeth June Horder, 4 March 2009; Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, part II, recollections of Annette Tolson, p 4, recollections of Bridgett Lytton-Minor, p 6

¹⁷¹ UoBSC, US 5 File II, 'Talks with Constance and Bachtin'

Friend, and Greenwood in his history of Quaker relief explicitly states that she 'was not a Friend'.¹⁷² Her ambivalence was also more widely known, as a letter written to her by a member of the student Christian Movement of the Institute of Education, London, some time later in 1948 requesting a talk on Soviet Communism stated that one of their reasons for asking her was that 'we hear that you are neither a Christian nor a Communist'.¹⁷³ Despite this, as we will see in the third part of this chapter the Quaker connection was key to her involvement in the Spanish Civil War. It was at a Quaker meeting in early 1937 that she heard Alfred Jacob speak of his experiences in Barcelona and within a matter of weeks she was on her way to Murcia.¹⁷⁴

II - 'I can't help feeling that all our lives are like that. All sorts of things really there & we don't see them'¹⁷⁵

Despite the fact that Francesca spent longer in Birmingham than in either Murcia or Vienna, and that she made the city her home for over 13 years, her story in Birmingham has been by far the most difficult to research and to write. It is far harder to construct a coherent narrative of her time here, partly because of the nature of her activism and what she chose to privilege in her published autobiographical accounts, and partly for reasons surrounding the nature of the primary source materials. The archival sources are fragmented,

¹⁷² MML, IBA, Box D-2: AJ/1, photocopy of part of a letter from Emily Parker, 1938, see chapter 4; Greenwood, *Friends and Relief*, p 230, note 2. The entry in the Dictionary of Quaker Biography for Francesca compiled in August 1981 by 'SGJ' stated that she resigned from the Society of Friends 'Some thirty years' earlier but maintained contact with the society and 'latterly' attended Hampstead Meeting, FL.

¹⁷³ Letter, 14 April 1948 in a file of correspondence held in a private collection. I am grateful to Elizabeth June Horder for allowing me to access this file.

¹⁷⁴ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 171. For information on Jacob see appendix one p 325.

¹⁷⁵ Vienna diary, 23 May 1920

dispersed, or outside the public domain, and she herself did not write extensive published autobiographical testimonies as she did with Murcia and Vienna. To a large extent one is left either reading her life through her writings on the lives of others, primarily the Russian children and Bachtin, or allowing the many silences that surround this period of her life to raise questions and possibilities rather than provide answers.

The quote by De Salvo cited in chapter one of this study, exhorting the biographer to focus on 'the story' they want to tell about their subject's life, and to leave the rest to someone else, is applicable not only to my telling of Francesca's life story, but it is also a fairly accurate summary of what she chose to do in her own telling.¹⁷⁶ The chapters on her activities in Murcia and Vienna rely heavily on two main groups of sources - her published autobiographical accounts in the form of books and articles in the press, and the organisational archives of the agencies within which she operated as a relief worker and humanitarian activist. In the published autobiographical accounts, with the exception of the narrative posthumously published by her family, she chose to tell a very public, external story, and moreover a story in which the international relief activities are privileged over her daily life in Birmingham and interior reflections on her private life. This leaves the biographer dependent on the patchy surviving records of the organisations within which she was active in Birmingham, on surviving personal papers such as diaries and correspondence, and on the recollections of others.

¹⁷⁶ DeSalvo, "Advice to Aspiring Educational Biographers", p 270

As the reader will already have gathered in the first part of this chapter, the organisational records of her activities in Birmingham are fragmentary; surviving school records for the ECECG are sparse; no records are extant for the Slavonic Society, and the records for the Birmingham branch of the WILPF do not survive before the late 1930s, leaving a question as to whether she was involved with the organisation at a local level, and the possible extent of any such involvement, unanswered. Records relating to the assistance provided to refugees, and the local activity in aid of the Spanish Republic, are few and fragmented; the local Quaker records although extensive, are organisational in focus and again pose more questions than answers about her religious beliefs.

In the 'Bibliographical Essay' which closes Rousmaniere's account of the life of the teacher activist Margaret Haley, she discussed the challenge of presenting a full narrative of her subject's life working from Haley's own published political autobiographical writings. Haley 'resisted any public understanding of who she was as a person' and was not given to personal reflection or introspection, keeping no diary and consciously including as little of her own personality as possible.¹⁷⁷ In contrast, Francesca was a keen diarist and her published writings include references to a body of diaries and personal correspondence preserved by family members.¹⁷⁸ However few of these personal documents are available in the public domain, and indeed there is no certainty that many still survive.¹⁷⁹ The methodological challenge therefore for Francesca's

¹⁷⁷ Kate Rousmaniere, *Citizen Teacher: The Life and Leadership of Margaret Haley* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005) p 254

¹⁷⁸ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p vii

¹⁷⁹ I was granted access to a collection of papers by her niece Elizabeth June Horder. Francesca's family believe that her literary executor, companion and amanuensis in later life, Frederick Wolsey, holds significant collections of diaries and correspondence but I have been

biographer is of a different nature to that of Rousmaniere, and centres on what difference, if any, having access to her personal documentation would make to the telling of a narrative of her life constructed from organisational archives and her own published accounts? How much illumination would such material throw on the considerable silences surrounding her life in Birmingham?

It is, of course, impossible to answer this question accurately without having access to the sources, however in an attempt to illustrate the questions posed by the tensions between personal and public testimonies, I intend to take two surviving diary fragments as case studies to demonstrate some of the issues raised. The first example is in private hands and looks back to chapter two and Francesca's time in Vienna; the second is held in the Nikolai Bachtin Papers at the University of Birmingham and concerns the period that she lived in Birmingham and the following decade.

The Vienna diary opens on 1st January 1920 and although there is no entry for every single day, it covers the whole year and describes aspects of her life in Vienna and a journey that she undertook to Serbia. Although it covers day-to-day activities such as visiting the depots, committee meetings at the Mission, and the books she was reading, it is by its very nature far more personal than her published accounts and provides an insight into her internal feelings and emotions. The diary opens with feelings of disillusion on the first day of the year, which was also the day of her thirty-first birthday, and we hear a very different, internal, voice to the tone of her published accounts:

unable to confirm this fact or clarify the extent and content of this material, or indeed whether it is still in existence. Information supplied by Elizabeth June Horder and William Horder.

A funny birthday - I had to get my passport viséd & we had a Committee [sic] in the morning. I read the Nation all afternoon which made me duly blue and gloomy. It is true 1919 brought the world terrible disillusion. There was a thick mist in Vienna a suitable shroud for a year that has been so terrible & has dribbled out so miserably. Let them bury it in it only the New Year began little better.¹⁸⁰

She was feeling resentful that her request to take leave to return to Britain for her brother Maurice's marriage to fellow relief worker Dorothy Brown, had not come though in time for her to depart with her colleagues Hibbert and Helen Fox. In contrast to her published writings we get an insight into the strain of being a relief worker abroad for lengthy periods of time. She consoled herself with the thought that feeling:

homesick...is after all a tribute to one's home one should not grudge paying occasionally. Vienna has become suddenly unendurable & the year & a quarter of my absence a crushing weight. I long for something to happen which may make me reconciled to staying.¹⁸¹

The following day she visited a blind school and then found comfort in shopping, purchasing a Pirot carpet in an antiquarian shop and a Macedonian scarf, with which she was 'very thrilled', feeling sure that 'it has been looted from the Serbs & that a poetic Justice [sic] has given it into the hands of a lover of Serbia'.¹⁸²

There are occasional references to her romantic life and the relationship with her Serb doctor, Zec, who appears only fleetingly in *Margins of Chaos*. Whilst on leave at home in Newcastle in February she wrote:

¹⁸⁰ Vienna diary, 1 Jan 1920

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 2 Jan 1920

¹⁸² Ibid., 3 Jan 1920

I tell Muriel the romantic possibilities of Jugo-Slavia & find her a most receptive listener. No one listens to ones confidences like a sister after all. They matter so vitally. Muriel was delightful because she realised the charm of le docteur & volunteered the remark that he must be a very exceptional person - for any country! This delighted me of course.¹⁸³

A few days later a walking tour with Gem Jebb acted on her 'like a tonic' and she reflected that it was just as well that she 'was not tied up with marriage in the wilds of Jugoslavia [sic]'.¹⁸⁴ In this light, her initial reaction to McFie's decision to marry a Serb later in the year is interesting, and possibly echoes her own feelings; on receiving the news Francesca 'can't get over it', and considers it to be both 'brave' and 'rash'.¹⁸⁵ At the same time Francesca's mother was obviously keen for her to marry, and whilst she was at home in February she was attempting to persuade her marry a C. Gill, a plan to which Francesca responded with dry humour: 'I suggest popping over & propositioning him as Mo [Muriel Davies] wants me to speak on Vienna to her school. I might just have time to work it in'.¹⁸⁶

The diary also throws light on her practice as a writer. Some aspects of the diary echo her published writings and one can see ideas and even direct quotes that are used later in her articles on Vienna and in *Margins of Chaos*. One element that comes through in both sources is her sense of the history of the city and her awareness of bearing witness to great historical change:

¹⁸³ Ibid., 4 Feb 1920

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 6 Feb 1920

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 23 July 1920. Similarly on 20 September Francesca writes of a discussion with friends about 'the amazing marriage', and prophesises that she thinks McFie will make a success of it as she does with all her undertakings but that 'it will take all her resolution & energy'.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 14 Feb 1920. I have been unable to identify C. Gill.

I have had a distracting sense all this month of the interest of life - almost painful interest. Life is really too intense - how does one bear it at all? Here one is at "history in the making" as Margo calls it & I could bear that perhaps if that were all but I feel so conscious of the past & the future as well as the present here in Vienna. I scarcely know which to turn my attention to.¹⁸⁷

Her reaction to place is evident on a number of occasions - describing the landscape and her joy in visiting and discovering new places, as well as the effect that the oppressive atmosphere of certain locations could have on her mood. On her first day in Salonika in September she wrote:

How odd it is to be in a place one has heard so much about. The narrow streets are just what I expected - that's so queer. But other things are all wrong...Its [sic] a place where one could feel unspeakably dreary. Dear dear, how dreary thousands of people must have been here in the war - at times at any rate! And what a front to fight on. My God - all the same it is a marvellous place at sunset...Salonique [sic] in spite of it being so beautiful at sunset depresses me. But I do feel it going back - back to the days of Ancient Greece & that is thrilling & its rather wonderful to see Greeks all round [sic] one & all like my Greek of Gidalitza. I wish he were here. How I hate being alone in a city!¹⁸⁸

One element which the diary illuminates clearly is her lively interest in people. It is full of long quotations and extracts from the speech of people she met, again illustrating her practice and suggesting that all the long quotes included in her published works were recorded in diaries at the time. Her reflections on how to read and interpret individuals anticipate her future turn to biography, and her reliance on life story vignettes in her autobiographical writings:

Tremendous knotty problem about what's interesting in people. I can't work it out properly. When I say that what I find really thrilling is to discover that people are symbols (and that's not quite so much it as types) it sounds so dull & gives the wrong impression. People think you

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 30 April 1920

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 9 Sept 1920, emphasis in the original

mean you have found a label for a person & can shut them up in a box & throw them away. It's really just the opposite - that is narrowing them down & the other thing is making them bigger. This man is a fanatic, you say, & that man is a real Jew. This woman's hysterical the other a born schoolmarm, so you dismiss them from the universe. You have pronounced the final word upon them & they can go. You have given them a label. What I want is really much [sic] different if I could only get at it. Its partly seeing people in perspective - seeing them as a whole.¹⁸⁹

Her love of meeting different people, and the relationship between this fascination and her love of travel and experiencing new places comes through clearly. Her reflections during a visit to Serbia and Montenegro on the 31 August (figure 8), a 'delicious' day when she felt the 'wanderlust' upon her, could almost be taken as an encapsulation of her experience of relief work throughout her life, and of what she was attempting to do in her life-writing:

A journey like that is like the whole of your Life [sic] in miniature, of course. You pass through valleys & over mountains. You leave the old landmarks & come to new. You have rain & cold & heat & storms weariness & refreshment - you pass through chasms where thieves & murderers lie in wait & you stay at wayside inns where beautiful women minister to your needs & bring your refreshment. And constantly you change your companions. As you jog along on your pony or press ahead on foot you find other travellers suddenly by your side conversing with you, urging themselves upon you, telling you their life-story & asking you for yours. And always these companions are changing - they leave you regretfully at the cross-roads & you meet with others, who in their turn greet you & converse & then go their way as you go yours. You come to little villages you have never heard of & strange little cities which you

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 31 May 1920

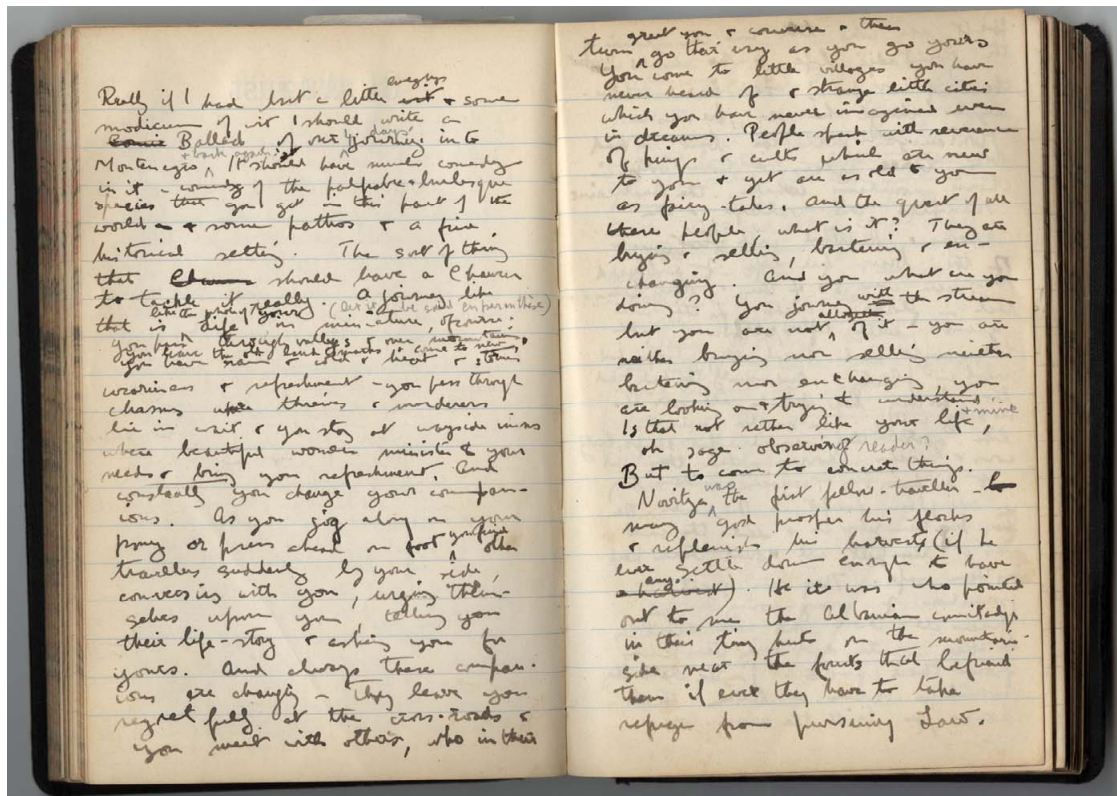


Figure 8: Vienna diary, 31 August 1920

have never imagined even in dreams. People speak with reverence of kings & cults which are new to you & yet are as old to you as fairy-tales. And the quest of all these people, what is it? They are buying & selling, bartering & exchanging. And you what are you doing? You journey with the stream but you are not altogether of it - you are neither buying nor selling neither bartering or exchanging, you are looking on & trying to understand. Is that not rather like your life, & mine oh sage observer? [amended to read oh sage observing reader?]¹⁹⁰

In contrast with some of the people she met during her relief service her relief worker colleagues are shadowy figures in Francesca's published writings, names of individuals referred to in passing when relating a particular activity, or paid a brief tribute for their work. There is very little on the relationships built and the interaction between the workers, many of whom were young people working in trying circumstances for lengthy periods away from home, or the

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 31 Aug 1920

human cost that this sometimes involved. The 1920 diary gives glimpses of how this element of the story might be illuminated if a complete series of diaries were available. One sad such example occurred during the spring and prompted her to reflect on life, death and melancholia. On the 16th April Francesca records that relief workers stopping over in Vienna on their way to Poland brought news that the Quaker worker Mary Appel was still missing, having mysteriously disappeared in Paris some ten days earlier. A few days later they received news that her body had been found in a wood near Versailles and that she had committed suicide:

The whole thing seems terrible & dark. Letters were found on [sic] to her parents & to Alison Fox. They show signs of great morbidity. It makes one speculate a good deal on melancholia & all those shadowy boulevards of the mind between sanity & insanity. Margo thinks a sane mind can never go through the stage of "never be happy again." That one always knows through experience one must. I don't see why. When experience brings up this argument one can always find some specious argument to refute it. That shows loss of balance no doubt but insanity?? [sic] I think all the same that Mary Appel's was temporary insanity. It has cast a terrible gloom over the closing up of the Paris work.¹⁹¹

One of the striking aspects of the diary in contrast to her published writings is the limited attention paid to Cizek and her involvement with the SCF exhibition. On the 12th April she recorded that she and Fraulein V. Schön spent an 'enchanted afternoon' looking at the 'amazing things' at Professor Cizek's, 'a delightful old creature' who 'loved' showing them the children's work and 'lingered over each one very lovingly' telling them what sort of child had made it, and how the child had explained it to him.¹⁹² Surprisingly however, the diary

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 21 April 1920. Fry, *Quaker Adventure*, pp 357, 363 list of FEWVRC relief workers 1914-23 describes Mary Ellen Appel as an American relief worker and Alizon [sic] M. Fox as a British relief worker. Francesca spells her name as Alison.

¹⁹² Vienna diary, 12 April 1920

only includes another three references to Cizek or the exhibition and interestingly there is no mention of Hawker until December, when she referred to a 'heart to heart' with him in the afternoon about 'the Exhibition at Knightsbridge' stating that:

Its [sic] all splendidly set out & I was very thrilled to see all the pictures again. There's a child who does pencil drawings - like an old master's as Hawker says. Exquisite things. I don't remember to have seen them before.¹⁹³

Chapter two interpreting Francesca's period in Vienna was written before I had access to this diary and although it did not prompt me to change the narrative substantially, it does prompt questions about the tensions between public and private sources, and the various versions of a life story that can be told when different sources are privileged.

The diary and personal papers held at the University of Birmingham are very different documents to the Vienna diary. Not only were they written several years later, but were also compiled by Francesca when she was grieving after Bachtin's death. Bachtin played a significant part in Francesca's life in Birmingham but is one of the major silences in her published accounts, despite the fact that *Margins of Chaos* is dedicated to him. The only other named references to him are two or three passing references in her later autobiographical piece published posthumously as *A Life of Service and Adventure*, the most telling of which is when she discussed the need for intellectual stimulus, laughter and intensity in a friendship and elaborated:

¹⁹³ Ibid., 20 Dec 1920. Cizek is also mentioned on 21 July and 8 Oct

'Bachtin's immense vitality and exuberance enhanced his sense of fun. Perhaps laughter is as important an ingredient in marriage as in friendship'.¹⁹⁴ However, Francesca's niece Rosalind Priestman, who knew both of them when she was a student at Woodbrooke College, Birmingham, described Bachtin as 'the great love of Francesca's life' and the first years with him as 'some of her happiest'.¹⁹⁵ She also asserted that when his wife Constance was dying in 1960 she poured out her resentment of Francesca's close relationship with him, a relationship which she felt had 'blighted' their marriage.¹⁹⁶

Similarly the diaries and biographical fragments held in the University of Birmingham give an impression of his central importance in her life. One of the items in the Bachtin papers is a school exercise book used by Francesca as a diary during a 1931 camping trip and then turned over and the back half re-used almost 20 years later in 1950. It differs from the Vienna diary in that rather than a chronological journey through a year it records two very specific events.¹⁹⁷ It begins on 24th July 1931 with Francesca leaving Birmingham at 11.30 and dropping off at Oxford to see McFie before meeting Sim and Guerchenkron at Victoria Station in London the following day. She and Guerchenkron crossed the Channel to France, and she noted her conversation during the journey about the 'world crisis' and women's new freedoms with a Manchester business man who 'looked rather common but his talk wasn't at all so'.¹⁹⁸ Bachtin met them off the train in Paris and the remainder of the first half

¹⁹⁴ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 103

¹⁹⁵ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, Part II, recollections of Rosalind Priestman, p 8

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ UoBSC, US 5 File III, diary 1931, 1950

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

of the diary describes Francesca, Bachtin and Constance's camping holiday in the Pyrenees. She described their day-to-day activities - walks, meals, camping sites, the scenery, bathing, and their discussions on various subjects such as what one meant by 'depth' in a person. However the entries' most interesting aspect is the insight they give to Constance and Bachtin's relationship and their relationship with Francesca, whom Constance had met for the first time only a few days earlier. Bachtin's stormy personality was already causing tensions. They visited Perpignan and Argelès sur Mer, the area to which Francesca would return to deliver relief to Spanish Republican refugees in 1939. This part of the diary ends with the last day of their holiday on 21st August and was later used by Francesca as a basis for her typescript biographical fragments entitled *Constance Pantling* and *Talks with Bachtin & Constance*, in which she described their relationship and the 'shipwreck' of their marriage.¹⁹⁹

The second part of the exercise book is comprised of diary entries for July 1950 opening at 'Chez Sim', 2 Rue Jaques Marras, Paris XV, on 15th July. Bachtin had recently died and the first few pages describe a meal cooked by Sim's wife Genia, during which Francesca and Bachtin's fellow Parisian Russian émigrés Cantor and Kobeko reminisce over his favourite dishes. Cantor talked of their early days as Russian émigrés in Paris and Bachtin's arrival in the city, whilst Kobeko recalled their life as school boys in Vilna, and as students in Petersburg and Odessa, where Bachtin first met Guerchenkron. The next entry is five days later at the home of Francesca's friends, the émigré

¹⁹⁹ UoBSC, US 5 File II

Czech Count and Countess Karolyi, at Vence, and finds Francesca reflecting upon her memories of Bachtin and the last few occasions she spent with him. She recalled her words to him one evening some three years earlier when he was depressed about his health following a coronary thrombosis:

“If you die I will miss you more than any one in the world” (- & all my life long, I thought, but perhaps didn’t say). He was touched & pleased though he professed himself sceptical. But he must have known I meant it because I realised it at that moment with extreme force & how much I realise it now!²⁰⁰

She reminisced about the last time she saw him in Paris and the three or four times he had stayed with her in London; his insistence on her visiting Birmingham in June, when she and Elsie Duncan Jones had discussed his lectures (‘lamps in the Brumagem night’). She recalled their reminiscences of some of their ‘best days together in the Christmas holidays of 1929-30’ just after she had taken the flat in Paris and when they were absorbed buying furniture for it; how they read Helen Gardener’s book on T.S. Eliot together (‘school-marmy’ according to Bachtin) and listened to Francesca’s gramophone recording of Eliot reading his Four Quartets, appreciating the language and the rhythm.²⁰¹ In parenthesis she added:

(And I remembered how I had once said to Mary “But I owe B infinitely more than he could ever owe me” and she had cried out “You are a fool, Francesca, you are a fool.” And when I told B he said yes really Mary was

²⁰⁰ UoBSC, US 5 File III, diaries 1931, 1950

²⁰¹ Helen Gardner was a lecturer at the University and involved in Aid Spain campaigns in Birmingham. She published *The Art of T.S. Eliot* in 1949 after she had left Birmingham for Oxford, see K.M. Lea, “Gardner, Dame Helen Louise (1908-1986)”, rev., in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39824> [Accessed 4 March 2005]

right. I said “No, no she wasn’t. What I said was quite true. It will always be true.”)²⁰²

The recollections close with a telephone call from Dr. Mollie Barrow on the day before Francesca was due to travel to France to say that Bachtin had suffered another thrombosis and that ‘this time it was the end’.²⁰³ On her arrival in France she broke the news to Sim and to Bachtin’s Parisian friends. The tone of the diary is one of great grief, and of Francesca reflecting on her long relationship with one of the most important people in her life:

I wonder sometimes whether in the great & conscious desire I have had all my grown-up life not to cling to any human being, not to let them feel that they have obligations towards me or that I expect anything from them, whether I have let them realize my affection for them. But I think that B. always knew the joy I had to see him...I know that B will go further & further away that Time [sic] the one compassionate goddess will (as they say) heal the wound of his loss but I don’t want it. I like him to be as he is now so present that I hear his voice. It is strange to think that the “dialogue intérieur” that I have had for so many years with him & that started again [replaced by ‘was incessant’ in a later hand] in the last weeks of his life must cease for ever.²⁰⁴

Bachtin’s death reminded her of her feelings on the death of her brother Maurice in March 1925, ‘that suddenly one realizes the uniqueness of a human being & at the same time what is universal in him’.²⁰⁵ She turned her energies to Constance and Bachtin’s colleagues’ plans to publish his work, and hoped that Constance would be able to remember the good elements of her life with Bachtin rather than the unhappy years.

²⁰² UoBSC, US 5 File III, diary 1931, 1950

²⁰³ Dr. Mollie Barrow was a Birmingham GP and a campaigner for social welfare, housing conditions, and educational provision in the Sparkbrook area of the city. She was one of the founders of the Sparkbrook Association which worked with the local black and Asian communities and her papers are held by BA&H.

²⁰⁴ UoBSC, US 5 File III, diary 1931, 1950

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

III - 'I see the main activities of my life as being three kinds: teaching, relief work and writing',²⁰⁶

In contrast to Vienna, Murcia, and other places in which Francesca was active, there are no lyrical descriptions among her texts recording her observations of Birmingham and its people, although they may of course have existed in her personal diaries. We are therefore limited to reading between the lines of her known activities and colleagues to see how the city influenced her future life. In some senses Francesca's relationship with Birmingham can be seen as problematic, Birmingham was a place in which she worked during the week in term time, whilst spending her weekends escaping to her Cotswold cottage, and her school holidays with Bachtin in Paris. Despite being the city in which she made her home for over a decade, it is relegated to walk on appearances in the dramatic autobiographical narratives of her activism. To paraphrase the title of her own account of the 1920s and 1930s one could perceive it as a place on the margins of the defining events of her life; an in between place, 'in between three wars' and in between significant periods of activism in Vienna and Murcia.²⁰⁷ However it was a place in which she spent over 13 years of her life, a place in which some of the defining personal relationships of that life were played out, and a place in which she engaged in two of the three defining aspects of her life as she summarised it - teaching and writing.

²⁰⁶ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 131

²⁰⁷ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*

As we saw in chapter two, her first book, *Portraits and Sketches of Serbia* was published in 1920 whilst she was in Vienna.²⁰⁸ Her second book was published whilst she was living and working in Birmingham. In the Spring of 1929 she travelled to the Balkans to investigate the conditions in Macedonia for the WILPF, and the report that she gave to the conference in Prague was later published by the League at a price of one shilling. In his foreword to the volume the historian G. P. Gooch emphasised the significance of the issues addressed in the book, describing the Balkans as ‘the principal danger-zone of Europe’, and drew attention to the particular qualities that Francesca brought to the study:

It is indeed a rare pleasure to read an account so lucid, so humane, so transparently sincere. She visited Macedonia last year, not to prove or disprove any thesis, but to see things as they are. She took with her what few travellers possess, a mastery of the Serbian language gained in war-work during the great struggle, and she rapidly picked up enough of the Macedonian dialect to converse with the peasants with whom she stayed.²⁰⁹

Francesca began her report by stressing the diversity of ‘races, languages and religions’ in Yugoslavia and defined the geographical limits and nature of the population, giving a summary of recent history before going on to describe her journey in the area and some explanation of her methodology:

²⁰⁸ Wilson, *Portraits and Sketches of Serbia*, p 5

²⁰⁹ Wilson, *Yugoslavian Macedonia*, foreword. In addition to being a historian George Peabody Gooch (1873-1968) was also a politician and had a number of philanthropic and international interests. He was involved in adult education and social work with Toynbee Hall, the Charity Organization Committee, the Church Army, the London City Mission and the temperance movement. As a Liberal politician he was elected M.P. for Bath in 1906 and was chief parliamentary spokesman for the Balkan Committee during Lord Grey’s tenure as Foreign Secretary. He was married to a German and was deeply affected by the First World War which provided the basis of much of his historical work for many years. He supported the creation of the League of Nations, and was later involved in assisting German refugees in the 1930s. See Frank Eyck, “Gooch, George Peabody (1873-1968)”, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33447> [Accessed 9 March 2009]

I stayed with peasants, with school-teachers and lawyers, and at all sorts of primitive little inns, talking with everyone I met from the lowest to the highest. I have notes of conversations with boot-blacks, farmers, merchants, Turkish hodjas, soldiers, young "intellectuals," school-girls, priests, doctors, Chiefs of Police and Governor-Generals. Later I went into Bulgaria, and got in touch with the Macedonian refugees there and heard their side of the question. From the confusion of impressions gained, certain ones emerge clearly, and I will put them down as honestly and impartially as I can.²¹⁰

Two of her notebooks from the journey illustrating this way of working survive in the Special Collections at the University of Birmingham.²¹¹ Based on these conversations and observations, her report discussed the poverty of the Macedonians, the economic potential of the area as a tourist destination, the grievances of the Macedonian population, their hardworking characteristics and thirst for education, religious persecution, the treatment of the Turkish and Albanian minorities in the area, and the people's relief at the replacement of a 'useless and insufferable' parliamentary system by a dictatorship. She reflected the WILPF's interest in minority rights in the late 1920s, and in the question of Serbs in Macedonia, and of Macedonians in Bulgaria, which dominated the British WILPF Section's interests in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria at this time.²¹² However, she stopped short of advocating full minority rights for the Macedonians, concluding that:

I do not believe that anyone seriously considers giving Macedonians these rights as Macedonians. It would be absurd to insist on schools where only their dialect should be taught, because it has no written grammar, varies from village to village, and has no modern literature. It

²¹⁰ Wilson, *Yugoslavian Macedonia*, pp 5-6

²¹¹ UoBSC, US 5 File III, travel diaries, 1929

²¹² It had formed a Minorities Commission in 1926, and in 1929 it organised a conference in London to discuss Minorities and the League of Nations. For a discussion of this issue and of British WILPF member Mosa Anderson's earlier visits to the Balkans and the WILPF's London Conference on Minorities and the League of Nations in 1929 see Bussey & Tims, *Pioneers for Peace*, pp 67-9

would be as logical to insist on Minority Rights for Highlanders or Yorkshiremen. The Bulgarians, on the other hand, and many of the exiles would like Minority Rights for them as Bulgarians - Bulgar schools, Exarchate Church and so on.²¹³

The report also included an interesting section in the light of her later anti-Fascism on her fears for the implications of what she titles 'The Italian Menace' and in which she listed a number of 'sinister facts':

I confess I was startled on visiting the country to see how completely it was transformed, not so much into an Italian colony as into an Italian camping-ground. Everywhere there are Italian officers, Italian aeroplanes, Italian engineers, Italian guns, and Italian banks. Swarms of school-children parade the streets of Kortcha singing the Fascist song and making the Fascist signal.²¹⁴

In conclusion she reflected on the changing fortunes of the Serb population and gave her opinion of the future needs:

In conclusion let me state that I do not believe the Macedonian Question [sic] to be insoluble under the present regime, given two conditions: first, that unfriendly interference and wilful fanning of discontented flames by outside Powers cease; and secondly, that the Government make a drastic effort by a more conciliatory policy to recover the ground it has lost in the last ten years. Minority Rights I do not advocate, but decentralisation: the admission of educated Macedonians into the administration of their country - and economic reform. Here is a land that could one day be the richest, most prosperous and most contented in the whole Kingdom - but these two conditions are essential: Yugoslavia must have peace and her Government wisdom.²¹⁵

The book received a short review in the Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs by C. A. Macartney who hailed it as 'the most valuable

²¹³ Wilson, *Yugoslavian Macedonia*, p 7

²¹⁴ Ibid., pp 20-21

²¹⁵ Ibid., p 24

thing which has been written on Yugoslav Macedonia in any Western language since the War' before going on to say that:

It should be bought by everyone interested in Balkan, or indeed in European politics. Miss Wilson writes with a real first-hand knowledge of her subject and with a sanely balanced judgement, although obviously disposed to adopt the Serbian point of view where she has not disproved it by her observation of facts.²¹⁶

In addition to this publication she also developed her use of the press whilst in Birmingham. As we saw earlier, Francesca began writing for the press in Vienna, mainly to publicise the Cizek exhibition or as an exercise in propaganda to raise awareness and funds for Quaker relief. Similarly following her return from Russia in 1923 she wrote articles for the press, which drew on her own experiences, and the following year in 1924 she published two articles drawing on her visit to America with the Cizek exhibition.²¹⁷ However, it was during her period in Birmingham that she began to regularly utilise the newspapers and journals as campaigning and fundraising tools and as a means of popular education for the causes in which she believed. Her realisation of the growing power and effectiveness of the press was reflected more generally in this period. There was of course a much older tradition of using newspapers to highlight social and political concerns by women writers,

²¹⁶ C. A. Macartney, *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 9, no. 4 (July 1930) p 561

²¹⁷ See for example, Francesca M. Wilson, "The Women of New Russia", *The Manchester Guardian*, 17 May 1923, p 6, which discussed women's economic and employment position, the provision of childcare and education, and which concluded that despite the fact that they did not necessarily believe in Communism, Russia was 'a land of hope' for the young; Francesca M. Wilson, "Land and Religion in Russia", *The Daily News*, 14 September 1923; Francesca M. Wilson, "The Young Girl of America", *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 August 1924, p 4 discussing the education and attitudes of young girls in boarding schools; Francesca M. Wilson, "The Bible as Drama. An Experiment in Schools", *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 August 1924, p 4 on an educational experiment in Boston that used drama to teach religious education.

but it was in the interwar period that newspapers achieved a mass audience, reaching a broad range of the population as never before.²¹⁸ Bingham in his exploration of gender identities and the popular press in Britain in the interwar years estimated that the circulation of daily newspapers doubled in the 20 years after 1918 and that two thirds of the population regularly had access to a daily paper by 1939, concluding that the medium became 'the most important channel of information about daily life'.²¹⁹ It is also in this period that newspapers were first systematically targeted as a means of mass communication by humanitarian agencies, primarily by the SCF with whom Francesca was closely associated, and whose appointment of a former journalist, Ernest Hamilton of the Daily Mail, as publicity officer in 1920 began a period of hard-hitting and highly emotive campaigns.²²⁰

Whilst in Birmingham Francesca wrote articles for a range of popular and specialist newspapers and journals. However, due to limitations of time and space I have not attempted to locate every single piece, but have rather opted for samples of her writing from specific years, concentrating on the activities and places which form the basis of this study. I have also chosen to concentrate on her articles from *The Manchester Guardian*, in which she appears to have published most frequently, probably because of its political outlook and her relationship with the feminist editor of its women's page

²¹⁸ See for example Seth Koven, *Slumming. Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2004), in particular chapter 3 pp 140-80 where he discusses the autobiographical influences and diverse motivations of particular women journalists.

²¹⁹ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, p 3; Bingham also cites the fact that Joseph Rowntree in his 1936 study of economic life included a weekly budget of 7d for newspapers as a necessity for a healthy life.

²²⁰ Fuller, *The Right of the Child*, pp 91-2; Freeman, *If Any Man Build*, p 30; Jones, *Women in British Public Life*, pp 81-2

Madeline Linford, and *The Birmingham Post* as the latter obviously has relevance to her life in the city. Most of her articles in both publications appeared on the dedicated women's pages, a reflection both of the relative status and limited opportunities for women writing at the time, and of the cultural and political assumptions of the subject matter that would be of interest to women readers.²²¹ Her pieces on women in other countries, and on issues relating to children and the psychology of their upbringing, reflect these ideas, as well as reflecting the increasing interest in internationalism and women's organisations seen in the pages of some of the popular press of the period.²²²

Before turning to her Birmingham journalism however, one particularly interesting article from 1923 deserves further attention.²²³ Although not written during her time in the city it discussed a fundamental part of her personal and domestic life in the 1920s and 30s, namely the adoption of children by unmarried women and their motivation for doing so. She contrasted the willingness of the working classes to take in children, with the middle class reluctance to adopt in case the child 'might turn out other than they would have him', and contended that there was 'an element of daring in adopting a child, and people with no sense of adventure will not undertake it'.²²⁴ Expressing the hope that a recent increase in middle class adoption was due to the fact that 'people really consider more the rights and needs of children in the century called so often the century of the child', she maintained that in part it emanated

²²¹ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, pp 39-42

²²² See Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, pp 102-5 on the interest in mothering and popular psychology, and pp 185-6 on internationalism.

²²³ Francesca M. Wilson, 'The Homeless Child', *The Manchester Guardian*, 19 September 1923, p 4

²²⁴ Ibid.

from the 'selfish' motivation of 'unsatisfied maternal instincts', tempered by an element of 'abnegation and altruism'. It is hard not to read an autobiographical subtext in the article and in a prescient moment she wrote:

If a woman adopts a child as much for the child's sake as her own, she can never question the sacrifices she makes for him, never feel that it wasn't worth while, nor turn a mind full of reproaches on her protégé, because she will know that she has given him a home and a chance in life that he would not otherwise have had - and if she has not done this then she can only blame herself. She will remind herself that she did not take him in order to get any special recompense of gratitude or love or because she wanted support for her old age.²²⁵

Despite referring throughout to boys, she considered that girls were more likely to be adopted; people were less fearful of girls, considered them easier to mould, and because of 'that dangerous hope of getting a return for their money in an affectionate daughter, who will stay at home'. Moreover, girls she fancied were cheaper to dress and educate than boys. She argued that prospective adoptive parents needed to eschew the unfair attitude of many parents in expecting gratitude from their children as of right, and the expectation that unmarried daughters would stay at home, giving up 'all that makes life worth while' to tend to parents until their deaths handed 'to society another sad old maid, left finally alone, with no means of earning a livelihood should the need for this arise, no work that can absorb her interest, and no one that really wants her'.²²⁶ In contrast her ideal parents allowed their unmarried children the freedom to live away from home following a college education. She closed the article with a discussion of the lack of legal rights for adoptive parents and a focus on the work of the National Adoption Society, and concluded that a

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

comparative study of England and America, where she maintained adopters had more legal rights, would be of great benefit to psychologists, throwing a light on 'the vexed question of the respective roles of environment and heredity'.²²⁷

The journalism in which she engaged once she had settled in Birmingham and which is discussed here dates from the 1930s, and appears in both *The Manchester Guardian* and *The Birmingham Post*. From 1932 we see a series of articles all connected by their strong autobiographical content, and by their focus on Francesca's relief activities and experiences of travel for humanitarian purposes. A few pieces draw on her experiences as a teacher and her interest in education. In an article in *The Manchester Guardian* in 1934, for example, she advocated the making of books by children as a means of alleviating the boredom and hypocrisy prompted by the writing of a weekly composition.²²⁸

The books should be as realistic as possible with chapters, prefaces and illustrations and she suggested starting with 'My Autobiography', as a means of connecting school work with real life and drawing in parents, whilst having the additional benefit of providing the teacher with more information and insight than she would normally have into her pupils. Her popular education interests are also reflected in an article arguing for the adult educational potential of the radio where she contrasted the 'disappointing' lectures for adults with the 'excellent' broadcasts for schools.²²⁹

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Francesca M. Wilson, "Children as Authors", *The Manchester Guardian*, 1 December 1934, p 8; see also Francesca M. Wilson, "Teaching History", *The Manchester Guardian*, 16 December 1938, p 8

²²⁹ Francesca M. Wilson, "Listening to the Wireless", *The Manchester Guardian*, 24 Feb 1937, p 8

In the early 1930s Francesca's attention turned to the rise of Fascism in Europe, and the article referred to previously from May 1933 drawing on her visits to Germany is an example of her journalism in this period.²³⁰ She also published an article describing a visit to Vienna, which focused on the anti-Semitism that she found there, the achievements of interwar 'Red Vienna', and her earlier recollections of the city.²³¹ A few weeks later we get another article on anti-Semitism amongst educated Germans and the persecution of the Jews in *The Birmingham Post*, and a description in *The Manchester Guardian* of a progressive Communist community for children in Lichtenstein, driven out of their original home by Hitler's regime.²³² Some of the talks on international issues that she gave to the International Section of the Birmingham branch of the NCW described earlier also appear as articles in the 'Women's Interests' page of *The Birmingham Post* and we also see her recycling memories of her earlier relief work prompted by current international issues, such as an article of the famine in Russia which she wrote because of the 'stories of the failure of the communal farms'.²³³ This exercise in journalism is of course reflective of her enjoyment of writing, but it is also notable for its increasingly politicised nature and her use of the press to draw attention to the situation in Europe, its humanitarian consequences, and the threats posed by Fascism.

²³⁰ Francesca M. Wilson, "A German University Town. After the Celebrations of May Day", *The Birmingham Post*, 16 May 1933, p 15

²³¹ Francesca M. Wilson, "A Visit to Vienna. Nazis, Socialists and People of No Party", *The Birmingham Post*, 23 May 1933, p 15

²³² Francesca M. Wilson, "Anti-Semitism Among Educated Germans. Headmistress and Orphans", *The Birmingham Post*, 9 June 1933, p. 15; Francesca M. Wilson, "A Community of Children. Exiles from Germany", *The Manchester Guardian*, 30 August 1934, p 6

²³³ Francesca M. Wilson, "Famine in Russia. Relief Work Among the Peasants", *The Birmingham Post*, 2 June 1933, p 15

From 1937 her articles and occasional letters to the press are dominated by another anti-Fascist cause, the Spanish Civil War. From the beginning of the war in July 1936 Francesca was surrounded in Birmingham by discussion and activity aimed at aiding Spain's beleaguered Republican Government. The local and national press included daily reports discussing the military situation in Spain, the British Government's non-intervention policy, the development of the International Brigades, and local and national campaigns to raise financial support for civilian relief. More significantly her social and political networks in the city including the international committee of the local NCW, her circle of migrant, refugee and politically active socialist and communist friends and associates centred on Birmingham University, and her connections with the local Quaker community, all provided ample opportunity for political discussion and to hear at first hand from relief workers in the field.

The first public political meeting in the city took place in the Bull Ring on 30 August 1936 and in its wake a number of public meetings and Aid Spain committees were established across Birmingham.²³⁴ This initial gathering was organised by the Birmingham Council for Peace and Liberty (BCPL), in which Francesca's close friend Helen Grant was active, and which had been formed in the autumn of 1935 at the instigation of the Birmingham Communist Party to combat local Fascism following Oswald Moseley's meeting in Birmingham Town Hall. Like Francesca, one of the BCPL's leading activists and its

²³⁴ For more on the local response to the Spanish Civil War see Peter D. Drake, "Labour and Spain: British Labour's Response to the Spanish Civil War with particular reference to the Labour Movement in Birmingham" (M. Litt. Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1977); Peter Drake, "Birmingham and The Spanish Civil War", in Brian Hall, ed., *Aspects of Birmingham: Discovering Local History* (Barnsley: Wharnccliffe Books, 2001) pp 45-54; on the local support for Spanish Refugee children brought to Britain see Myers, "Englishness, Identity and Refugee Children in Britain, 1937-1945"; Myers "The Ambiguities of Aid and Agency", pp 29-46

secretary, Mrs. A.M. Newth, was a history teacher in one of the city's premier girls' schools, Edgbaston High School for Girls, and her husband taught at Birmingham University.²³⁵ In addition to combating Fascism, the BCPL was also concerned with civil liberties and one of its earliest campaigns was in defence of two activists arrested for trade union recruitment outside factories in the city, one of whom was the poet John Cornford whose name would later become iconically associated with the Spanish Civil War.²³⁶ Francesca was acquainted with Cornford's parents - Frances (née Darwin) and her husband Francis, a Classics Don at Cambridge - both through her own Newnham connections and those of Bachtin, who was a colleague of Francis' at Cambridge. She was also acquainted with Cornford's partner, Margot Heinemann, who taught at Bournville Day Continuation School and who was herself very active in the BCPL and Spanish campaigns locally. Heinemann later recalled that the BCPL had a broad support base in Birmingham including Quakers, Unitarians, members of the Church of England, the Trades Council, and the Liberal and Labour parties.²³⁷

In January 1937 the BCPL organised a 'Spain week' in the city, which culminated in a 'Justice for Spain' conference at Digbeth Institute on Saturday 16th January at which Professor H.J. Laski argued that Spain epitomised the struggle against the advance of Fascism that threatened European democracy

²³⁵ Drake, "Labour and Spain", p 247. Francesca's friends the Duncan Jones' were also involved.

²³⁶ Ibid., pp 247-8; John Cornford was one of the first Britons to die in Spain in late 1936.

²³⁷ IWM, Sound Archive, 9239/5, oral history interview by Jim Fyrth with Margot Heinemann. Cornford had intended to study for a PhD at the University of Birmingham. See also Margot Heinemann, "Remembering 1936: Women and the War in Spain", *Women's Review*, 12 (October 1986) pp14-5, where she summarised the significance of Spain for women sympathetic to the anti-Fascist cause.

and 'might be the preamble to the next world war'.²³⁸ A few days after the Laski meeting, Francesca may well have been present at another in the Friends Meeting House in Bull Street. Chaired by George Cadbury, its purpose was to raise funds for the relief of children and the audience was addressed by two Quakers who had recently returned from Spain, Bronwen Lloyd Williams and Horace G. Alexander, the latter illustrating the children's plight with lantern slides.²³⁹

Less than two months later on 25th March 1937 Francesca was herself on her way to Spain. Her activities in Spain will be dealt with in the next chapter, but she was not in Spain for an unbroken period of time. She spent the next two years travelling between Murcia and Birmingham and a brief note on how she spent her time when at home is included here as it naturally forms part of the picture of her time in Birmingham. In addition to her active relief work in the field she became involved in the Aid Spain campaigns in the city, and further afield in the UK. Her experiences as an 'eye-witness' in Spain obviously gave her authority as a speaker and she was in demand from a plethora of political, religious, and humanitarian organisations that were active in campaigning and fundraising. She later recalled that she addressed some forty meetings on Spain during this two-year period - speaking of her experiences to schools, colleges, head-mistresses conferences, co-op societies, the Labour Party

²³⁸ *The Birmingham Post*, 18 January 1937, p 11

²³⁹ *The Birmingham Post*, 21 January 1937, p 6

which she joined during the Civil War), and of course meetings organised by the Society of Friends (see figure 9).²⁴⁰

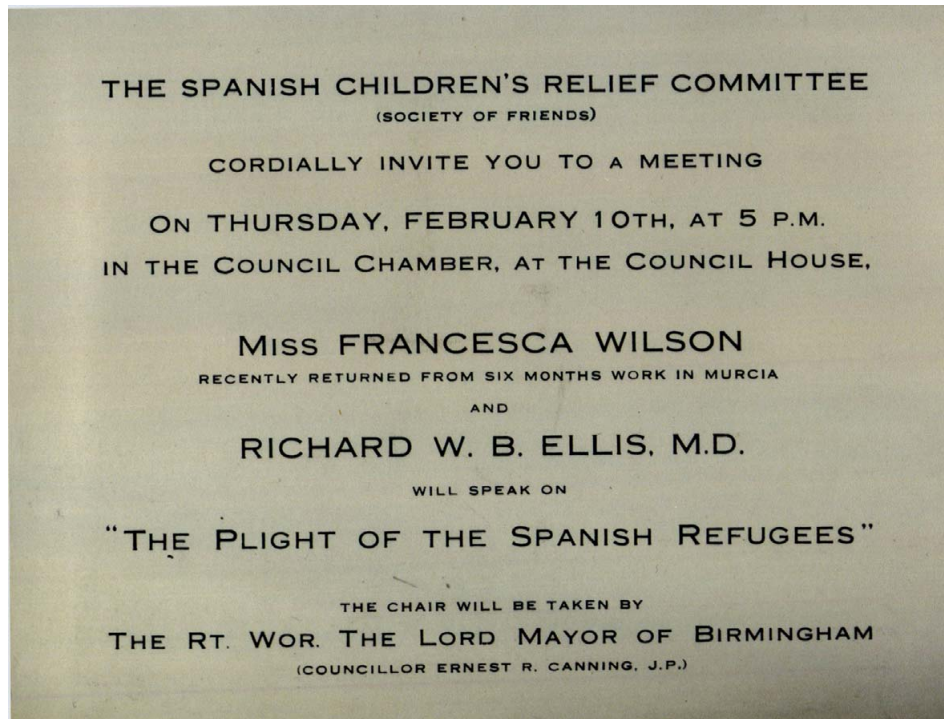


Figure 9: Invitation to an Aid Spain meeting organised by Birmingham Quakers, 10th February 1938, BA&H, local scrapbooks collection

The local Quakers had been quick to respond to the outbreak of war in Spain and formed a Spanish Relief Committee in 1936.²⁴¹ When at home in Birmingham Francesca participated in the work of this committee, and in February 1937 it was resolved to invite her to join the committee, along with

²⁴⁰ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 127; tutor's application form to the University of London's University Extension and Tutorial Classes Council in 1943. I am grateful to Elizabeth June Horder for allowing me to access this document.

²⁴¹ See Bull Street Meeting House, WNMM records, Spanish Relief Committee, minutes and accounts 1936-39. Meetings of the committee are attended by well-known local Quakers including, among others, Horace Alexander, Margaret A. Backhouse of Westhill College who would later chair the FSC and collect the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the Friends in 1947, Evelyn and Teresa Sturge, W.A. Albright, M.C Albright, Helen Graham, Percy Fox, John Hoyland, Ethel M. Barrow, Julia Whitworth, and George Cadbury.

four others as a means of 'strengthening' it. A week or so later the committee decided to ask her to write a pamphlet on her return home and requested that whilst in Spain she should 'be on the lookout for new photographs'.²⁴² The way in which the photographs were used locally can be seen in figure 16. The committee was very active in raising funds, part of which went towards supporting two colonies for refugee children in Catalonia, at Rubí and Caldas de Maravella.²⁴³ They also funded some of Francesca's activities, so for example on 7th June 1937 the Birmingham Committee requested the London Committee to ear-mark £50 of Birmingham money 'specially for Francesca Wilson and a letter of appreciation and thankfulness for her concern to be sent to her'.²⁴⁴ At various meetings over the following months her work was discussed, monies were allocated to her, and she attended to report on her work and on conditions in Spain and later in France. The committee was also keen to use her expertise to train other speakers on Spanish Relief, and to use the local press to disseminate her experiences by organising the interview that opens the next chapter.²⁴⁵

As well as addressing meetings she was also busy writing articles and appeals in the national press and in *The Friend* and a number of these will be referred to in the next chapter as they provide one of the sources which articulate her activities in Spain. Here it is sufficient to note that this experience of journalism

²⁴² WNMM, Spanish Relief Committee, minutes 25 February 1937, 11 March 1937

²⁴³ Members of the committee expressed doubts as to the wisdom of bringing Spanish children from Spain to Britain and preferred to support children in Spain where possible, see WNMM, Spanish Relief Committee, minutes 7 June 1937

²⁴⁴ WNMM, Spanish Relief Committee, minutes 7 June 1937. A month later after her return from Spain Francesca attended the Birmingham committee to give a report of her work in Murcia, see minutes 2 July 1937

²⁴⁵ WNMM, Spanish Relief Committee, minutes 4 October 1937; 17 January 1938, John Hoyland undertakes to try to get press coverage for her work, see figure 10. The same meeting discussed the arrangements for the event in the Council House shown in figure 9.

and of addressing public meetings whilst in Birmingham laid the foundations and set the tone for her later journalism and other public education activities during and after the Second World War, raising awareness of the humanitarian and political issues surrounding refugees and displaced people in the 1940s and 1950s.

One final ambiguity remains relating to Francesca's time in Birmingham. It is not at all clear when she left the city, as the records for the Second World War are fragmentary. She retained her membership of George Road Quaker Meeting until 1950, and was listed as the owner of 35 Duchess Road until 1961 after which the house was demolished.²⁴⁶ However, after she departed for relief work in Hungary in 1939 there is little evidence that she spent much time in the city. Apart from the periods when she was in Europe during the Second World War, she appears to have been in London during the war years working for refugee organisations, and following her return from Germany in 1946 she settled in Fellows Road, London, where she kept a house much like her home in Birmingham. Arguably however, the key event which marks the end of her period in Birmingham could be taken to date from two or three years earlier, and her decision to return to active relief work during the Spanish Civil War, a decision that would change the course of her future life. Birmingham led to Murcia, and Murcia in time led to her departure from Birmingham.

²⁴⁶ BA&H, Birmingham City Council Rating Records 1951, 1961

CHAPTER FOUR

MURCIA: 'MISERABLE TOWN THAT IT WAS, DREW ME LIKE A MAGNET'¹

'Numbers and numbers of children were dying, and I saw dreadful things,' she said. 'It was almost the greatest misery I have ever seen in my life. There were children so cold they could not get up all day, and the conscious misery of the people appalled me. Practically all the women had had to flee and leave their husbands behind and many of them had lost one or two children.'²

This highly emotive quotation comes from an interview in the *Birmingham Post* on 19 January 1938. The report is headed 'Relief of Refugees: Miss Francesca Wilson's Work In Spain'. The full interview (figure 10) captures almost all the key features of her relief activities in Spain - her motivation to assist women and children, the relevance of her previous experience of relief, and the stages through which her work progressed (food and medical aid, occupational, educational and recreational activities, and children's colonies). Furthermore, as a text it encapsulates her use of life histories - her own and those of the refugees with whom she worked, to raise awareness and financial resources, and to engage in a discourse of aid to establish her own particular claim to knowledge, authority and expertise in this area during and after the Second World War.

This chapter is organised in three parts. The first part will outline Francesca's relief activities in Murcia and the surrounding area. In so doing it will raise significant features of her life story, character and values which come to light in

¹ Wilson, *In the Margins of Chaos*, p 189

² *The Birmingham Post*, 19 January 1938, p 15

RELIEF OF REFUGEES

MISS FRANCESCA WILSON'S WORK IN SPAIN

Miss Francesca Wilson, who has spent the past nine months doing relief work among the refugees in Republican Spain was asked by a "Birmingham Post" reporter, in an interview yesterday, if she saw any finality to the war in that country. Her reply was: "It felt as if the war was going to drag on and be a long war. The more influential and intelligent of the people seemed to think it was going to be a long business. The spirit of the people seems to be remarkable, and in a lot of places I went to there was an ardent feeling. I found great spirit among the women. The Government side has great confidence, and is well organised and much better disciplined than earlier."

Miss Wilson, of 35, Duchess Road, Edgbaston, is a mistress at the Church of England College for Girls, Edgbaston. She has been doing work for the Society of Friends in Spain since early spring, providing starving and suffering families of refugees with food and medical attention, and helping them to obtain some form of settlement during the continuance of hostilities. She did relief work in Russia during the War, and afterwards in Serbia.

Miss Wilson went out to Spain in the early spring of last year and, apart from a break in July, when she returned to England to obtain more funds, she has been working for the relief of refugees until she came back a week ago. The greater part of her time was spent in Southern Spain, chiefly in Murcia.

Her earlier experiences in dealing with the refugees brought her into contact with extremely bitter hardship among the afflicted people driven from their homes in a war-torn area. "Numbers and numbers of children were dying, and I saw dreadful things," she said. "It was almost the greatest misery I have ever seen in my life. There were children so cold they could not get up all day, and the conscious misery of the people appalled me. Practically all the women had had to flee and leave their husbands behind, and many of them had lost one or two children."

The first work was the supply of extra food and the establishment of a hospital. Later Miss Wilson organised workrooms for girls to give them some occupation, and there she and others taught sewing and sandal-making, altogether establishing about thirteen centres in various parts. The next thing was to provide some recreation and education. Many of the refugees were backward and illiterate. They were taught to read and write, and were delighted to be able to write little letters to their soldier sweethearts and brothers.

Finally, after a trip to England, where she obtained about £250 from organised sympathisers and friends, Miss Wilson established a farm colony for the older boys, with very good results. She said the Government has established many colonies for the younger children in unused hotels and large houses, and is doing extraordinarily good work in this way. Miss Wilson said the position now is much better in the south. The people get two meals a day, where they had one; but in Catalonia it is bad, as the district is swamped with refugees.

Miss Wilson spoke of many of the International Brigade as quiet, honest, working-men—"the kind of man you could imagine wheeling out the pram on Sunday." They had given up their jobs to fight. They said it had taken some consideration, but they felt it was the only thing to do.

Miss Wilson is now resuming her teaching and said she did not anticipate returning to Spain unless it was during holidays.

Figure 10: *The Birmingham Post*, 19 January 1938

this episode. The second part focuses on methodological issues of truth, representation and authorial voice which came to the fore during the process of researching her activities in Spain. In the third part of the chapter I explore the significance of Murcia as a place in Francesca's wider life story.

I - The 'Inglesa who brought hope to the hearts of the refugees in Murcia'³

As we have seen in early 1937, a year before the above newspaper report was published, Francesca was a senior history mistress at the ECECG in Birmingham and was taking an active interest in the international situation. In her later account of her motivation to intervene directly in the Spanish Civil War she described attending a Quaker meeting:

Early 1937 I heard Alfred Jacob, the Friends' representative in Barcelona, describe the relief work he was doing in Government Spain. He was running a canteen at the station for women and children fleeing from the advance of Franco's troops and also distributing milk to infants in Barcelona. He said that nearly all the good arable and pasture land of Spain was in Franco's hands and that the food situation in the Government area was difficult, especially in regard to milk: the need for help was urgent...A friend of mine who knew Spain intimately urged me to go. It would be interesting to see the experiments in collectivisation, and in education. Good heavens! I thought. Social experiments, educational reform - it was not my idea of civil war. "But what do you think the Government is fighting for?" she said. "It has something it values. There is a whole Spanish Renaissance at stake." I often thought of her words when I was in Spain.⁴

³ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, letter from Esther Farquhar, 18-21 August 1937. For information on Farquhar see appendix one p 323.

⁴ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 171. The minutes of the Governors of the Edgbaston Church of England College confirm her statement about requesting leave, BA& H, MS 2278, minutes, 22 March 1937, p 424. I have been unable to trace the meeting referred to here. For information on Jacob see appendix one p 325.

By 25th March she was on her way to Spain under the auspices of the Society of Friends. The travelling party included Alfred Jacob's wife, Norma, together with Cuthbert Wigham, Barbara Wood and Rica Jones of the FSC and Geoffrey Garratt of the National Joint Committee.⁵ It also included Janet Perry, a lecturer in Spanish at King's College and Francesca's friends Muriel Davies, then Headmistress of Streatham Girls School, and Helen Grant.⁶

During the three-week visit Francesca, Grant and Davies undertook a survey of the Republic's educational provision and its provision for refugees so that they could speak authoritatively at fundraising meetings on their return.⁷ Both Grant and Francesca wrote detailed accounts of their visits to children's colonies and model schools and it is clear that they were deeply impressed by the progressive, child-centred approach that they found. They repeatedly remarked on the way in which children of all ages were encouraged to develop self-expression and initiative, and on the fostering of citizenship and responsibility through self-government in the schools and colonies. They were full of admiration for the beauty of the children's environment and the care given to the design, furnishing and cleanliness of the buildings. They noted with interest the importance given to oral and group work, handicrafts, and artistic and vocational education. A measure of Francesca's enthusiasm for Republican educational endeavour can clearly be seen in the following extract:

⁵ CUL, Helen Grant Papers, MS ADD 8251/II, typescript report on Spain. Grant's diary records that Jacob himself was a member of the party but his correspondence in the Spain files at the FL indicate that he was already in Barcelona when they arrived. For information on Garratt see appendix one p 324.

⁶ For information on Grant and Davies see appendix one pp 322, 324.

⁷ CUL, MS ADD 8251/II, typescript report on Spain

Government Spain was advanced in educational experiment. I began to understand what my friend had meant by a Spanish renaissance... Their modern secondary schools (the *instituto escuela*) impressed me particularly. I visited one in Barcelona where there were six hundred boys and girls (they were all co-educational). It combined order with informality. There were no desks, just small tables, sometimes separate, sometimes put together for larger groups with a vase of flowers in the middle. They were taught on a modified Dalton system. There were classes, but many boys and girls were working together on special assignments. Forty of them were away on a week's educational excursion in the mountains. They all went [on] these expeditions in turn, staying in huts, doing their own cooking, making maps of the district and collecting specimens for their science lessons. Handwork was compulsory and of a high standard. The children printed their school magazine on their own printing press. I saw several numbers illustrated with original coloured prints and lino cuts.⁸

The overwhelming impression made on both women was of the high priority given to education and child welfare by the Republican authorities, and the importance of a Republican victory to maintaining the reform of education and social welfare. The Republic's image for enlightened social and educational reform was a key part of its attraction to left wing intellectuals and activists in Britain and Grant and Francesca were no exception. In Grant's opinion there was 'no doubt that, to the majority of the younger people at any rate, the revolution means a chance to get better educated'.⁹

Grant later recalled that Francesca's primary concern was to examine the Spanish Government's relief for displaced children and assess the kind of support they wanted from international aid workers.¹⁰ During the Civil War the Government evacuated a large number of children from the cities to the relative safety of educational colonies in the Republican zone in Eastern Spain.

⁸ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 198-99. A copy of this magazine, or a very similar one, entitled *Institut-Escuela 21*, Barcelona 1937, can be seen in the MML, IBA, Box A-5: C/11 and in the LSEA, Spanish Civil War Collection, Misc 91, 29/2, microfilm number 515

⁹ CUL, MS ADD 8251/II: 5

¹⁰ IWM, Sound Archive, 13808/1/1, interview by Jim Fyrth with Helen Grant

As with all attempts at establishing statistics for refugee movements, it is difficult to find accurate figures for the numbers involved, although one study estimates that some 200,000 child refugees fled, or were evacuated, to the east.¹¹ Another source estimates that by September 1937 over 45,000 children were being cared for in 564 colonies.¹² Historical accounts by relief workers at the time appear to confirm the scale of these numbers, an account written by five American social workers published in late 1937 estimated that 60,000 children were living 'in colonies or semi-colonial groups' and this is the figure that Francesca herself quotes.¹³

Francesca was particularly interested in the organisation and ethos of the colonies and wished to ensure that any similar relief initiatives would be of an equally high standard.¹⁴ Although she conceded that conditions did deteriorate during the war, she was deeply impressed and enthused that at their best the colonies 'were like our newest and most brilliant schools'; Spain in her view, gave the children of the poor the same opportunities as the children of the rich in Britain.¹⁵ Her descriptions of the colonies are full of their cleanliness, communality, and the element of responsibility conferred on the children; describing Perelló near Valencia which was under the supervision of an educationalist named Angel Llorca she wrote:

¹¹ See Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) p 13 for unreliability of statistics relating to refugees; figure quoted in Geist & Carroll, *They Still Draw Pictures*, p 17

¹² 'El Exilio Español de la Guerra Civil: Los Niños de la Guerra' [online] <http://www.ugt.es/fflc/ninos00> [Accessed 3 April 2005]

¹³ Child Care Commission of the Social Workers Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, "Case Record of New Spain", *Social Work Today* (November 1937) pp 9-11 and (December 1937) pp 21-22; Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 198

¹⁴ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 197

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 172

When I arrived the children were bathing in the sea, but they soon collected in a large, friendly room for their evening session. They sat around tables, painting or playing games or sewing, then they recited and sang with verve and spontaneity. After this Angel Llorca summoned the children's Parliament, and the children discussed the various problems of their Home, with complete unselfconsciousness. They were mostly homely matters - a rearrangement of their lessons, the feeding of the chickens and rabbits, the assignment of domestic duties, the water supply.¹⁶

She rapidly came to the conclusion that they were the most effective way of caring for displaced children and providing them with a high quality education and this had a formative influence on her thinking and her subsequent decisions about the direction that relief work should take.

On 17th April Grant and Davies returned home by air leaving Francesca 'looking rather pathetic' and bound, as Grant thought, for Sir George Young's hospital unit in Almeria, via Alicante and Murcia.¹⁷ On the following day Francesca wrote to Grant from the Hotel Victoria in Valencia where she had stopped off en route thanking her for 'taking the two village idiots around with you, as you did, introducing them to all your thinking friends and explaining things so lucidly', adding that as she herself used to find interpreting for people 'a great bore' she considered Grant 'a brick!'¹⁸ Despite feeling 'flat' without her 'compañeras', and catching Grant's 'nasty' throat, she had been working 'like Hell' [sic] writing a nine page report for Edith Pye and two articles for *The Manchester Guardian*, both of which appeared in the paper over the following weeks: 'Evacuation Work in Madrid: A Home for Children' on 29th April 1937 as a letter to the editor, and 'The Women of Madrid: Dancing in the Food

¹⁶ Ibid., p 198

¹⁷ CUL, MS ADD 8251/II pp 72, 75-6

¹⁸ CUL, MS ADD 8251/VI/73

Queues' on the women's page on 4th May.¹⁹ In the latter we see elements of her writing style which appeared in previous chapters - her concern to create atmosphere and conjure a mental picture for her readers, her passionate interest in people, in this case women, and the day-to-day issues that affected their lives, and her use of life stories and reported conversations to draw her readers in and personalise brutal or unpleasant information:

One of my pictures of Madrid is of thousands of people, standing and waiting. Yet they were cheerful when I asked them about it. I talked to Luisa, a woman who had five children. She was a well-educated, jovial person. She had sent her four elder children away to a "colony" in Valencia, but she had to stay herself because of her husband, who was doing war service, and because of her baby of nine months. Her flat had the chilly mausoleum atmosphere of the hotel, but she was buoyant enough to disperse the gloom of it to me... "Queuing is nothing nowadays to what it was," she said. "I have known times when we queued from five in the morning till seven at night, taking turns with each other, for a bit of fuel or a tin of milk for the child, and when everyone got the same amount however large the family. Now it is much better. We have numbers and know the hours when we have to go, and our rations are properly proportioned. Those queues you see don't wait more than an hour or so. Of course there is very little when you do get it. Still, one gets accustomed."

So the children play in the streets among the debris and the women chat while they queue - once I saw them dancing - "en Madrid mucha alegría!"²⁰

Soon after writing these articles in Valencia she was on the move again, heading south to Murcia where she found a city overwhelmed by refugees fleeing Franco's attack on Malaga.²¹ She later described her magical journey

¹⁹ Francesca M. Wilson, "Evacuation Work in Madrid: A Home for Children", *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 April 1937, p 20; Francesca M. Wilson, "The Women of Madrid: Dancing in the Food Queues", *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 May 1937, p 8

²⁰ Francesca M. Wilson, "The Women of Madrid: Dancing in the Food Queues", *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 May 1937, p 8

²¹ CUL, MS ADD 8251/VI/74, in the letter she states that at the time of writing Murcia had 100,000 refugees.

to Murcia contrasting it with the chaotic scenes that confronted her on her arrival at the Pablo Iglesias refuge:

The journey passed like a dream. Rice-fields, green with shoots, sprouting through water, lakes with boats that had curved sails, lemon trees and orange groves, then sudden sea yellow sands [sic], white fishing villages, then inland again, this time through groves of date-palms and gardens where hemp and peanuts and pimento grew, and mountains terraced for olive and vines, carob and cork-tree and fruit trees, sprayed with blossom.

Then the dream was over and we were in a nightmare. We were on the outskirts of Murcia in a vast, unfinished building of apartment flats, nine stories high, pushing our way through crowds of ragged, wild-eyed refugees. There were no windows or doors in the building: the floors had not yet been divided into rooms and formed huge corridors, which swarmed with men, women and children of all sizes and ages. There was no furniture, except a few straw mattresses. The noise was terrific: babies crying, boys rushing madly from floor to floor, sick people groaning, women shouting. There were said to be four thousand in the building, though I doubt if anyone had counted them. They surged around us, telling us their stories, clinging to us like people drowning in a bog.²²

Faced with this nightmare her first step was to convince the relief agencies further north of the great need in Murcia. In a letter to Grant on the 23rd April we see the extent of her shock and frustration, and her determination to alleviate the distress:

I found a horrible state of affairs in Murcia - 4000 refugees in one "shelter" higgledy-piggledy children dying there everyday, (so they said) & only one meal of soup a day. There are 6 Refuges like it in Murcia but the others average only about 1000! I wish you and David had seen it really, because it so [sic] incomparably much worse than anything we saw before...I try to induce them here to send up help to Murcia but George Young is in England so they will have to wait for his return in a fortnight...Tomorrow I go back to Valencia & see what help I can exercise for Murcia. If anything can be done immediately by the Friends or any-one else I will go down there again.²³

²² Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 173

²³ CUL, MS ADD 8251/VI/74, letter written in Almeria where she has gone to visit Sir George Young's hospital. David is Muriel Davies.

So effectively did she communicate the need that less than a week later on 29th April Barbara Wood, the Friends representative in Valencia, reported that: 'Miss Wilson returned from her tour of investigation round Murcia and district full of tales of horror - the need down there seems limitless'.²⁴ Wood and Geoffrey Garratt responded immediately as Francesca later reported to the FSC:

Barbara Wood and Garrett [sic] were up in Madrid but I got a letter through to them and they came back full of eagerness to help - in fact Garrett wanted to send off with a lorry load of food travelling through the night so that people shouldn't be hungry a day more than necessary. Finally we compromised on an early start next morning and Muggeridge and I arrived here on April 29th with a lorry full of condensed milk.²⁵

Back in Murcia she concentrated initially on organising a breakfast canteen for children and pregnant women who were fed cocoa and biscuits. Her correspondence captured her excitement at being of use in a difficult situation and her single-minded determination to get things done once she had formulated a plan. Indeed she abandoned her original plan to leave Spain on the 11th May as she explained in a hurried postcard dashed off to Grant on May 8th from her first home at Plano de San Francisco, 3, which also captured something of her thrill at the responsibility:

Tremendous rush of work here - it's really rather exciting. Greatest imaginable need. Valencia is splendid, sending along tons & tons of food. I have been here 10 days & can't possibly leave yet so have wired Miss Godfrey for further leave till mid-June. Sad about Whitsuntide. But they don't speak any Spanish & I couldn't leave them to it for another month.²⁶

²⁴ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/3, Barbara Wood to Alice Nike, 29 April 1937

²⁵ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 19 May 1937

²⁶ CUL, MS ADD 8251/VI/78. 'They' referred to an English female relief worker and nurse who had joined her.

As the title of this chapter demonstrates, Francesca was not initially favourably impressed with Murcia, describing it as 'one of the dirtiest and most backward' towns in Spain. As a garrison town already full of soldiers and home to two military hospitals, its population of some 100,000 inhabitants had been swelled to breaking point with the arrival of thousands of refugees.²⁷ Francesca's account of the conditions in Murcia was confirmed by other relief workers who arrived later. The British nurse Dorothy Davies described Murcia and Francesca thus:

She has been the moving spirit of many of the enterprises now running. She found the building for the Murcia hospital & got the garden ploughed-up and planted. She started the workshops in the refugios.

Murcia is a large city [It lies in the fertile plain watered by the river Segura - shortage of water.] about fifty miles inland from Alicante & its population has been almost doubled by the tremendous influx of refugees from Cadiz, Seville & Malaga, Cordova & Madrid & many other places... It is a city of many convents & these are all now used as "refugios" where the refugees are housed. Considering that many of the buildings are hundreds of years old & just like rabbit warrens it is amazing to me that conditions are not worse. As far as possible the refugees are kept in families, the lucky ones have a small room for the family in other cases several families share a room. The gallery of the church with just a torn piece of sheeting to keep off the draughts from the church itself was occupied by three families in one of the refugios I visited...We heard that there was a lot of illness amongst the children in Pablo Iglesias. This refugio was for transient refugees & was a terribly depressing place. It was an enormous block of flats erected before the war & for some reason condemned before it was ever finished.²⁸

Davies' impression of Francesca as a 'moving spirit' is corroborated by an intriguing portrait drawn by the relief worker Frida Stewart from Cambridge who arrived in Murcia in May 1937. She recalled Francesca 'looking as if she had just come from a garden-party in a Sussex village, tall and slim and so very English in a light cotton frock - in contrast to the universal black of the Spanish

²⁷ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 174

²⁸ MML, IBA, Box D-2: AC/1, Dorothy Davies, "Six Months in Southern Spain", photocopy made by Jim Fyrth. Sentence in brackets added in superscript in the original.

women'.²⁹ Stewart went on to emphasise Francesca's vision and determination:

[Francesca] had all kinds of other plans which she unfolded as we sat in the hotel lounge that sweltering afternoon. Five of us - a strange army for the relief of Mafeking! Francesca, however, had no doubts that her plans could be put into operation.³⁰

To realise her plans Francesca knew she would need Spanish support and she was quick to identify local officials with whom she could co-operate and established a number of effective and friendly local partnerships in Murcia with men such as Manuel Delgado, the Head of the Assistencia Social, and Montalban, President of the Local Refugee Committee.³¹ She was also friendly with a local headmistress, Encarna Anton, despite on the whole being disappointed in the women of Murcia whom she found to be very different to the 'Anti-Fascist women and school-marms' whom she had encountered in Barcelona, Valencia and Madrid. They were not keen to assist with the relief work and lived in 'harem-like seclusion' despite the best efforts of the Republic.³² As Mendlesohn demonstrated in her account of Quaker relief in Spain this co-operation with the local authorities was characteristic of the Friends, and other members of the American team which arrived to take over in Murcia also had close relationships with local people. Emily Parker, of whom more shortly, became very close to the local workers especially a young

²⁹ Reminiscences of Frida Stewart quoted in Jackson, *British Women and the Spanish Civil War*, p 119

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 19 May 1937

³² Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 175

teacher named Clara Smilg and her family whom she provided with food and with whom she spent a considerable amount of her free time.³³

As Pablo Iglesias had the worst conditions of all Murcia's refuges, accomodating 4000 refugees who received only one meal a day, Francesca decided that it would be the priority and that all the children would receive breakfast; as with other early Quaker feeding programmes in Spain it was limited to feeding children and pregnant women.³⁴ The first morning was a failure, as only 60 children registered for their breakfast. On enquiring why, it transpired that it was because she 'looked a little foreign, so the rumour went round that every child on the list will be taken to Mexico or to North America or Russia'.³⁵ Francesca refused to be disheartened by this, or by the warnings of Miss Thurstan, sent from Young's unit in Almeria to help, that she should 'start small' as Malagans were 'very wild'.³⁶ She abandoned her registration scheme and was soon overwhelmed:

The next day we were stormed out with children clamouring to be fed. Some of them were big lads whom my helpers tried to evict but finding it rather beyond their strength they accepted in the end their plea that they had only grown rather fast but were really children and mine that although big they were still hungry. Then the nursing mothers came along [~~and those who are called here "creating" and~~] the whole place was pandemonium and rather dangerous with people crowding round the scalding chocolati and dipping cans into it and trying to seize the biscuits. I ran to the Committee with my troubles and they got 400 aluminium cups made for me over night and a lot of tables and benches and cleared a whole large room for a dining room. We got the places set for the children beforehand and things would have been alright if it hadn't been for the

³³ Interview by the author with Clara Smilg, 17 May 2005. Emily corresponded with Clara for many years after her departure from Spain, see chapter five.

³⁴ For a discussion of Quaker feeding policy and how it changed over time according to need see Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief*, pp 28-30, 96

³⁵ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 174

³⁶ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 19 May 1937

wild hordes of women whom I seemed incapable of keeping at bay till the children were finished and I was ready to feed them. I asked the Committee to send me Caribineros - I said the children might be crushed to death or scalded but they only smiled deprecatingly - I thought too late of Miss Thurstan's warning and wished I had kept out the nursing and creating mothers however hungry. The numbers increased to about 700 but it felt like three times the amount. I kept wondering how the five thousand had ever got fed. Did they snatch and push and shout and scream? One thinks of them as sitting quite orderly on the grass, waiting their turn, and yet they were Orientals like the Malagans (who are half Moors) and Jewish mothers are usually very passionate about their children and there must have been some mothers amongst them.³⁷



Figure 11: Breakfast at Pablo Iglesias, 1937, from *Margins of Chaos*

By May they were also feeding a further 1780 people with a second meal of 'bully beef and bread', varied with bacalao and potato when supplies arrived from Valencia. Condensed milk was distributed to children under 11 in the other refuges, and sugar to those refugees who had medical certificates. As the number of relief workers in Murcia increased with the presence of Kathleen

³⁷ Ibid., sentence in brackets struck through as in original.

McColgan, Eunice Chapman and Frida Stewart, the breakfasts were also rolled-out to four other refuges in the city (Durutti, Ascaso, Lenin and Largo Caballero).³⁸ Keeping up a feeding programme of this scale during a war was a precarious business and the correspondence is peppered with references to the scarcity of food and the difficulties of obtaining supplies, which affected both the Friends and the local refugee committee.

Early on in her time in Murcia Francesca had realised the inability of the local educational and health services to cope with the large influx of refugee children, and the team of relief workers attempted to alleviate the situation. Whilst Francesca was determined to improve conditions for the large numbers of sick children 'lying in their dirty rags, on the floor, in crowded rooms', Frida Stuart, for example, started a play centre and kindergarten for the children in Ascaso refuge, assisted by McColgan who 'gave them drill and games'.³⁹ Francesca's account of how she established a children's hospital reflects her determination and talent for securing assistance when required. She first referred to her plans for a hospital on 19th of May in a passing reference to her discussions with Sir George Young and with Lopez Diaro of the Ministry of Health.⁴⁰ Her first attempt to convince the local authorities to provide a suitable building was halted by inter-factional politics when the local 'chief doctor', an Anarchist who had promised her a building, was replaced with the change in Government.⁴¹ Her friend the local headmistress Encarna Anton took her to the Mayor who was swayed by a timely article which appeared in the local

³⁸ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/2, FMW to FSC, 9 June 1937

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 19 May 1937

⁴¹ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/2, FMW to FSC, 9 June 1937

paper on the following day 'saying that when benevolent English women had come over to make a Children's Hospital, it was a scandal not to give them a house for it'.⁴² Eventually they were assigned a modern villa in Puerta Nueva near the University. Francesca explained that she did not feel at all sorry for the owners who were turned out to make room for the hospital as they had another home to go to and she felt it was 'ludicrous that such a place should be inhabited by a handful of people when it might be housing 30 sick children, several of whom would die if they did not come to it'.⁴³

Within two weeks the Hospital Ingles para los Niños had been equipped and staffed with a mixture of Spanish and British personnel, a situation which would later cause tension due to the differences in attitude and procedures between the Spanish doctor, Don Amalio, and the British nurses.⁴⁴ Staff at the Almeria hospital had warned that it would take a long time to win over the trust of the refugees, but as Francesca and her colleagues were already well-known in Murcia this was not the case and the patients arrived in numbers:

The children began to pour in. Even Nurse Shaw who for days had been complaining that she wanted to start whether we were equipped or no, that children were dying in Pablo Iglesia, was slaked and silenced. Actually the first morning was great fun. We went round to the Refugios with a huge Hotel bus and collected all the sick children from their straw and flies and bought [sic] them along for examination. After this effort we found ourselves landed not only with babies but with mothers attached and the first 8 days we looked rather like a Maternity Home. Then the typhoids began to pour in - typhoids in all stages of fever, delirium and sickness. It was a terrific business for one sister to tackle [sic] but Nurse Shaw was wonderful and Frida Stewart a perfect brick. For the night we got a trained Spanish woman. Nurse Shaw who had nursed typhoids in a Bournemouth epidemic kept reminding us that the proper quota was one

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ See Fyrth & Alexander, *Women's Voices*, p 206 for account of this disagreement.

Nurse to three patients - by the time we had 13 for her alone this figure sounded ludicrous, besides pneumonia babies and other oddments.⁴⁵

Once the hospital was on its feet and Sister Dorothy Morris, a nurse from New Zealand, and Mary Elmes, sent out by the Friends to take over from Francesca on her departure, had arrived from Almeria, the number of beds was increased to 50 and in October the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) took over its financial support.⁴⁶ Francesca relinquished responsibility for the hospital and turned her attention to other schemes, a common pattern in her Murcian story in which she appears to be the driving force behind the establishment of initiatives before turning them over to others to administer. It was in the excitement of starting new initiatives that the appeal largely lay for Francesca, a fact of which she was well aware; describing Montalban she commented: 'Montalban's mind works with great rapidity and he loves beginning something new as much as I do'.⁴⁷

On occasion one suspects that some of the other relief workers were suspicious of this tendency and that they perceived Francesca to be something of a maverick. Again, she was aware of this, in a letter of 25th September, for example, she confessed that she felt considerable relief when Manuel Delgado agreed to maintain the workshops which she had introduced, as Dr. Pictet of the SCF had queried whether 'it were wise to start them when no one knew if they could be carried on after my money is exhausted'.⁴⁸ Another relief

⁴⁵ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/2, FMW to FSC, 9 June 1937

⁴⁶ Francesca M. Wilson, "Relief Work in Murcia", *The Friend*, 11 Feb 1938, pp 109-10

⁴⁷ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 12 Sept 1937

⁴⁸ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 25 Sept 1937



Figure 12: The Children's Hospital in Murcia, c. 1937, from *Margins of Chaos*



Figure 13: Children sitting outside the hospital, c. 1937 from *Margins of Chaos*

worker, Eleanor Imbelli, had also expressed doubts and 'already given me a sense of guilt by telling me it was foolish to begin things that I couldn't carry on. It seemed possible that she might be right'.⁴⁹ However, these momentary doubts passed when Delgado came to the rescue leaving her 'full of hope'.⁵⁰ Based on her previous relief experience Francesca was adamant that one should be prepared to take risks, even if that meant occasional 'sleepless nights':

It was the same with everything I started in Spain - the wise and experienced warned me against it, whatever it was: the breakfasts in Pablo Iglesias, the children's hospital in Murcia, and now the workshops. They spoke with the voice of prudence. But in relief work prudence is not enough. When needs are great, risks have to be taken.⁵¹

The workshops referred to here are also characteristic of her strong belief in self-help. Not only was it crucial to uphold refugees' morale and self-respect during their displacement, but also to provide education and practical skills for future self-sufficiency. She began by developing occupational workshops, aimed at female refugees between the ages of ten and 30, which would provide an opportunity for training whilst also enabling the participants to feel that they were making a valuable contribution to the relief effort.⁵² The first workshop, which trained women to sew, was established in the Ascaso refuge with the assistance of the Mayor and within a fortnight it was 'a grand success'.⁵³ It had two aims - 'one to provide clothes, made to their own

⁴⁹ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 25 Sept 1937

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 192

⁵² FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 12 Sep 1937

⁵³ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 9 Jun 1937

measure for refugees and the other to give occupation and instruction'.⁵⁴ No one who wanted to learn to sew was turned away and by 2nd November 1937 there were 104 girls and women working in the Murcia workshops.⁵⁵ Again this drew directly on her earlier experiences, occupational workshops had been a key feature of her work in the rehabilitation of wounded Serbs after the First World War.⁵⁶

The workshops were expanded to nearby towns, including Alicante, Lorca, Crevillente and Orihuela, until there were ten in all.⁵⁷ Francesca also established alpargata workshops, which employed men and women making the hemp and esparto grass rope soled sandals that were worn locally, thereby alleviating the shortage of footwear whilst also 'learning a useful trade'.⁵⁸ In these developments she again found a natural ally in the president of the local refugee committee, Manuel Delgado, who as we have seen agreed to sustain the workshops in the longer term. Their success confirmed her belief that the most effective relief was that which empowered refugees by giving them the opportunity to make an active contribution to their own welfare rather than passively rely on the charity of others:

I am particularly pleased because they disprove the theory that one is constantly hearing that refugees won't work. Of course they won't work if they are ordered to like prisoners or if they see no point in it - who would? But they work very eagerly in these workshops, most of the time for other people and not for themselves - but they see the good of what they do - they give out the clothes themselves when they are made or at least

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ FL, FSC/R/SP/5, "Workshops and Clubs In Murcia and Alicante", 2 Nov 1937

⁵⁶ See Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 15-88

⁵⁷ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, report entitled "Projects By Classification"

⁵⁸ Wilson, "Relief Work in Murcia", pp 109-10

watch their distribution: moreover they realise that they are learning something useful.⁵⁹

She believed that the refugees should enjoy their work and that as well as making useful materials they should have the opportunity to showcase their talents and make beautiful items. In Francesca's Spanish workshops this included fine embroidery on items such as tablecloths, and also the making of dolls in traditional Spanish costume. These 'fancy' items had a practical purpose as well, inspired by her Viennese experiences, and an earlier fundraising sale of Polish handicrafts at Friends House, Francesca hoped that a similar sale could be arranged for the Spanish goods.⁶⁰ The Spanish embroideries and dolls were taken to Britain and the USA for sale and Margaret Backhouse of the Birmingham Friends, for example, bought an embroidered tablecloth for 15s.⁶¹ Francesca also believed that the refugees were entitled to fun in their lives and organised parties and dances in the workshops to boost morale, maintaining that the resulting joy and cheer was worth the small cost in supplies. In a report of 2nd November 1937 she described 'a fine party' held for all the workshop participants and teachers the previous Saturday:

They were all wildly excited and gay and looked so clean and pretty - the girls many of them in frocks they had made themselves. They sang and they danced and to end up with had a cup of chocolate (the famous Cadbury[])] and a bun made out of the flour and sugar of the American Friends. We want to make the party a fortnightly affair. I was rather fussed beforehand thinking that over a hundred people would need some organising but as Eleanor says these Spanish people with their spontaneity lack of selfconsciousness [sic] and wild spirits make any party go.⁶²

⁵⁹ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 12 Sep 1937

⁶⁰ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, leaflet re clearance sale of Polish handicrafts, 23 June-31 July 1937

⁶¹ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, letter Dorothy Thomson to FMW, 8 Oct 1937; FSC/R/SP/3/1, letter Dorothy Thomson to FMW, 9 Dec 1937

⁶² FL, FSC/R/SP/5, "Workshops and Clubs", 2 Nov 1937

She was a firm believer that cultural and recreational activities were an important element in keeping up people's morale.

Having already exceeded her leave from school Francesca returned to Birmingham in the middle of June 1937 and spent the following two months fund-raising, and persuading her 'most indulgent Head-Mistress', Freda Godfrey, to give her further leave for the whole of the autumn term.⁶³ On her return to Spain in August she undertook a journey of investigation into conditions in Central Spain visiting Cuenca which proved unsuitable for workshops as the 22,000 displaced people there were scattered in various towns and the need did not appear to be so great as in other places.⁶⁴ She settled for a short time in Alicante, where she found the 3000 to 4000 refugees better housed and fed than those in Murcia, and so concentrated on establishing a sewing workshop with the assistance of a 'modista' named Obdulia. Obdulia had run a sewing academy in Madrid and was what Francesca described as 'a real Madrid type - energetic, confident and buoyant' who immediately grasped Francesca's idea and set to work with 'miraculous' speed.⁶⁵ Within two days Obdulia and Francesca had set up a workshop and had 34 'girls' between the ages of 10 and 30 learning how to sew, making clothes and linen for the Children's Hospital. Again we see a glimpse of Francesca's charm and her talent for winning people over. Obdulia, she wrote, was very pleased when Francesca brought foreigners to visit her workshop and when Francesca told her that it was the best in Spain, easing her

⁶³ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 12 Sep 1937

⁶⁴ Ibid., she intriguingly states that despite finding 'several kind people to befriend me', she 'had a very curious time - interesting to look back on but rather difficult at the moment for reasons that I can't very well describe here', but unfortunately does not elaborate.

⁶⁵ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 12 Sep 1937

conscience with the thought that even if this fact were untrue 'at least Obdulia believes it and it spurs her to great efforts'.⁶⁶

Her short respite in Birmingham had proved fruitful and she had returned to Murcia, 'feeling like a millionaire' with 'hundreds of pounds to spend as I liked'.⁶⁷ She later wrote fondly of her return:

When I arrived I wondered that I had been able to stay away from it so long. People were so kind and welcoming - it felt like home. It was very exciting to see the Hospital - enormously increased since my time, the magnificent hall downstairs turned into a ward for a dozen children, more children (nearly fifty now) more nurses, more Spanish staff, more doctors: a tremendous hive of activity. In spite of being so much bigger it hadn't lost any of its kindness, warmth of atmosphere and power of adapting itself to circumstances. Relatives are no longer admitted at all hours (an indulgence of the first fortnight, a ruse in fact necessary for the persuading of mothers) but at visiting times the place is full of picturesque, gipsy-like folk and the buzz is greater than ever.... I had imagined when I was in England that there would be no more work for me in Murcia but Esther welcomed me enthusiastically and assured me this wasn't true.⁶⁸

As with the earlier comment on Jewish 'Oriental' mothers and Obdulia's Madrid traits, her references to the 'picturesque' and 'gipsy-like' reveal a certain exoticism of foreigners in her descriptions. This is repeated in many of her texts, which are dotted with essentialist and romantic references to Spanish characteristics, 'Orientals', 'peasants' and 'gypsies'. In this, she was not unusual among foreign commentators in Spain, and to some extent it reflects the period and culture in which she lived. Mendlesohn for example identified a comparable 'primitivist and essentially orientalist approach' to the 'Spanish

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 190-191

⁶⁸ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 12 Sep 1937

character' in Alfred Jacob.⁶⁹ Similarly Buchanan has argued that attitudes to the Civil War in Britain on both the left and the right were 'rooted in (often crude) ideas about national character', and that 'even sophisticated commentators on Spanish affairs tended to rely heavily on clichés'.⁷⁰

Francesca's romanticism extended to her view of the International Brigades and Jackson in her study of British women and the Civil War identified Francesca in particular as being infused with a sense of their 'mythic' qualities and notions of a mediaeval crusade.⁷¹ Again, she was in keeping with the ideas of the time; as Brothers has demonstrated notions of the 'warrior hero' participating in a 'crusade' were very prevalent in British and French reporting of the war and were utilised by both sides in the conflict.⁷² Similarly Stradling has drawn attention to the power and longevity of the 'literary-romantic myth' and 'epic-heroic reputation' of the Brigades.⁷³

On her return to Murcia Francesca was pleasantly surprised by the transformative effects of the workshops, which were supervised in her absence by Esther Farquhar of the AFSC:

Most of them are of the roughest sort, refugees from Malaga with standards of living in any case very low now degraded by the miseries of eight months of life in the refugios, some of them without beds or anything necessary to human decency...Only two or three of the girls had the

⁶⁹ Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief*, p 26

⁷⁰ Tom Buchanan, "A Far Away Country of Which We Know Nothing", *Twentieth Century British History*, 4, no. 1 (1993) 1-24 pp 4-5; see also Tom Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain: War, Loss and Memory* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2007)

⁷¹ Jackson, *British Women and the Spanish Civil War*, pp 186-187; CUL, ADD 8251/III, includes a manuscript article by Francesca on the International Brigades, I have not located a published version.

⁷² Caroline Brothers, *War and Photography: A Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 1997)

⁷³ Robert, Stradling, *History and Legend: Writing the International Brigades* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003) pp vii-viii

slightest conception of how to hold a needle. They were rough and noisy used awful language, made everything in a mess when they took their Chocolati in the morning or afternoon. Already there is a great transformation...We scarcely thought when starting that the Workshops would have civilising effect as well as their other uses but such is in fact the case.⁷⁴



Figure 14: Refugee women sewing in the Pablo Iglesias workshop, 1937

In addition to the 'civilising' benefits of instruction there was also a moral case for keeping the 'girls' occupied. Farquhar was increasingly concerned about the danger of young, disillusioned and poor female refugees falling into prostitution. Francesca wasted no time engaging in moral condemnation but took the view that: 'Any one who has seen them lying on a sack in the corner of a dark and airless room, with nothing but rags to wear can scarcely wonder at this'.⁷⁵ Her answer was to extend the workshops into evening and weekend clubs where the girls and women could play board games and read. It soon

⁷⁴ FL, FSC/R/SP/5, "Workshops and Clubs", 2 Nov 1937

⁷⁵ Ibid.

became apparent however, that what they wanted was the opportunity to learn to read and write.⁷⁶ She bought the 'pens and pencils and ABC's and exercise-books that are the minimum for a start' and again had no difficulty in eliciting the support of the local authorities, which found volunteer teachers prepared to teach in the evenings.⁷⁷ Although there are hints in the FSC correspondence that some of the other relief workers believed the money would be better spent on food for children, she had no doubt that the beneficial effects far outweighed the costs:

It was interesting to watch girls who had come from a way of life so primitive, learning to make clothes, to read and write, take an interest in their personal appearance, and work for the common good. The workshops seemed, not the dull places they are in our industrial towns, but islets of civilisation in the middle of chaos.⁷⁸

As we saw earlier during her original journey to Spain with Grant, Francesca had been 'dazzled by the beauty and charm' of the children's colonies and by the time she returned to Murcia in August 1937 she had already formulated a plan to establish her own colony for unoccupied boys who were too old at fourteen for the Government colonies.⁷⁹ This was inspired by her experience of Spanish colonies and her previous relief activities, elsewhere she described the Friends' plans in Serbia after the First World War for a 'model farm, where boys can learn agriculture and the simpler trades'.⁸⁰ Again she sought to address both educational and practical needs as Esther Farquahar, describing Francesca's return to Murcia, made clear recording that Francesca had 'a

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 191-2

⁷⁹ Wilson, "Social Work in War-Time Spain", MML, IBA, Box D-2: AM2

⁸⁰ Wilson, *Portraits and Sketches of Serbia*, p 10

glorious idea for an agricultural colony for boys where they can learn modern methods as well as produce some much needed food'.⁸¹

Her interlude in England had provided her with the necessary finances, and she set about finding a suitable building with the assistance of a Pioneer called Emilio, whom she described as a 'slender, dark-eyed, wiry' seventeen year old, reminiscent of 'some sort of animal of the cat tribe, something not bigger than a panther: Spaniards of the south are rather small. A nice animal anyway, quick and graceful in movement'.⁸² Finally they settled on a disused flour mill outside Crevillente and all that remained was to ensure that the local authorities made some improvements to the building and secure the services of Gerardo Ascher ('Rubio' in her published writings), a German Jewish engineer, who had lived in Spain for several years and who had previously been trying to develop a 'Rural School' near Malvorosa.⁸³

My farm colony looks as if it might really come off - isn't that a thrill? The elusive Gerardo I bearded in his den and carried off [sic] and he approved of my Mill and the Mayor and Peasant Syndicate of Crevillente have given it to me and the Pioneros and the Instruction Publica to make a Farm Colony of. The Instruction Publica will have to enlarge the kitchen and make W.C.s and douches and all that will take some time...This is the way I want to use the funds given by the Defence of Spain Committee in Birmingham. I am sure they will like the idea of having started a farm colony in Spain. The mill is an admirable place - it has two houses in very good condition and magnificent stalls and stables. There is room for from forty to fifty boys. It is isolated and the road to it is bad and there will be lots of difficulties - still it is going to be fine.⁸⁴

⁸¹ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, Esther Farquhar to FSC, 21 Aug 1937

⁸² Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 193

⁸³ FL, FSC/R/SP/5, file "Spain Relief AFSC Reports and Minutes", FMW to Misha, 7 Nov 1937

⁸⁴ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to Barbara Wood, 25 Sep 1937

Francesca described life in the colony in an article in *The Friend*. The boys kept goats for milk, chickens to provide eggs, rabbits for meat and grew potatoes, radish, lettuce and spinach. They attended classes every day, made their own furniture and implements in a carpentry workshop and even had a small engineering workshop despite being hampered by the lack of supplies.



Figure 15: Boys at Crevillente Colony, c.1937

All their needs for clothes and bedclothes were supplied by Francesca's sewing workshop at Crevillente.⁸⁵ The American Quaker Emily Parker, who worked with Esther Farquhar in Murcia, and had a particular interest in educational relief and play schemes for children, wrote the following account of the colony that also gives an insight into Francesca's single minded determination:

⁸⁵ Francesca M Wilson, "A Farm Colony in Spain", *The Friend*, 2 Sep 1938, pp 755-6

Every one discouraged the place as a possible spot for the venture but Francesca Wilson - English friend of the Friends - was not to be deterred and so it was decided that a colony for refugee boys with school, workshop and such general training as could be given should be started. Gerardo, the young German, is one of the most resourceful chaps I have ever met. I wish I could describe to you in detail the way in which he has changed what seemed an unlikely spot into a boys' home with every modern convenience possible (including the ping pong set which I gave them). The plan was to have the boys, about 50, for a six months' course the completion of which was to equip them for further study in trade schools or for some actual mechanical work. There is Gerardo who teaches some mechanical training, a school master for geography, arithmetic, etc, and a farmer who supervises the planting... The boys have made rabbit pens, chicken houses with fancy nests that let the hen in but not out until she has laid an egg... They have also made some toys for the hospital... They have physical exercises every morning on the roof... Gerardo also built in a shower room and he told me that he had to give a piece of chocolate in the early days to get the boys to get under. They now all take their shower and like it!⁸⁶

Back in England during the summer term of 1938 Francesca received letters from Spain describing the air-raids in Alicante and was horrified that 'children should have to live in constant terror'.⁸⁷ With the school holidays before her she decided to establish 'a camp for some of them on a safe seashore'.⁸⁸ An advert placed in the FSC *Bulletin* for tents and other equipment brought a positive response from Leighton Park School and she returned to Alicante at the end of July 1938 and set up a beach camp near Benidorm, then a small fishing village.⁸⁹ Gerardo and the boys from Crevillente were on hand to help and she was very pleased at how the farm colony 'had made them into healthy, handy, well-mannered, companionable human beings'.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ MML, IBA, Box D-2: AJ/1, photocopy of part of a letter from Emily Parker, 1938. For information on Emily Parker see appendix one p 329.

⁸⁷ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 206

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ FL, FSC/R/SP/5, file "FSC Bulletins", *Bulletin*, 23, 29 Jun 1938

⁹⁰ Francesca M. Wilson, "A Children's Camp in Spain", *The Friend*, 25 Nov 1938, pp 1038-39

At first the other children with whom they shared the camp, particularly the girls, were wild and uncontrollable, a situation which Francesca ascribed to their being unused to communal life. As with some of her earlier comments on the sewing workshops, she also betrayed some of her class prejudices:

The children were very wild. There were the fiercest quarrels. Every now and then hell would be let loose...The girls were the worst. I would find them yelling abuse at each other like women in slums, or locked together screaming, tearing each other's hair out, biting like mad dogs.⁹¹

Several of the children were in fact very homesick, traumatised by their experiences, and they longed to return home to their families despite the danger and shortage of food. To convey this to her readers Francesca used her customary device of 'quoting' the children's own words, a familiar practice in her work and one to which I shall return later in this chapter:

More difficult than the quarrelsome were the homesick. Most of them got over it, but Antonio, aged ten, was incurable. "Couldn't you stop crying, Antonio," I pleaded, "and try to enjoy yourself a little? I know you are a sensible boy." "I have no complaints," he replied sadly, "everyone here is very kind. At home there is very little food and here I have lots to eat and sea air and bathes [sic] are fortifying I know, but you see, my aunt is all alone and I don't know what she does without me. My aunt is not exactly old but still rather old - she is forty eight - and now that there is no wood to buy I always used to go to the hills and gather sticks, and when there were potatoes I stood in the queue for them...I promised Antonio that I would send him back in the English lorry when it came in three days time...Maria was another inconsolable. What did she do in the home she so longed to return to I wondered. "I sweep," she said simply, but she cried so much that in the end I had to send her back to her broom, as Antonio to his sticks. Was this duty to their homes a way of explaining to themselves the fearful discomfort of being away from familiar surroundings?⁹²

⁹¹ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 208

⁹² *Ibid.*, p 209

Despite these initial problems most of the children settled down quickly and when the British nurse Dorothy Davies visited she recalled that the children 'ran entirely wild and enjoyed themselves immensely'.⁹³ With the onset of autumn, and her forthcoming return to Birmingham, Francesca installed the girls in a nearby villa, paid for by an un-named Birmingham Quaker and administered by a Basque teacher assigned by the local education authorities, and the boys returned to the farm colony at Crevillente.⁹⁴

Francesca told the story of the Benidorm camp in a second article in *The Friend*, and closed her account with a direct appeal for funding which emphasised the difference that intervention made to the quality and happiness of the children's lives:

I left both colonies - Crevillente and Benidorm - supplied with money and food for some weeks. Whether they go on after that depends on the generosity of people over here. With children and staff they provide for nearly a hundred people. I know that, compared with the great mass of misery, they seem small enterprises. Yet I do not think they are small. They are happy places.⁹⁵

This reflects her strong belief that the quality of the individual experience of relief, and the long-term transformative potential, were as important as providing emergency aid to as many people as possible. In this she was not unusual among the American Quaker women with whom she worked in Murcia. Both Esther Farquhar and Emily Parker were in agreement and Parker's opinions in particular, when writing on the educational value of the Crevillente colony, were very much in sympathy with Francesca's own views:

⁹³ MML, IBA, Box D-2:AC/1, Dorothy Davies, "Six Months in Southern Spain"

⁹⁴ Wilson, "A Children's Camp in Spain", p 1039

⁹⁵ Ibid., p 1039

It is the type of thing I am especially interested in as you well know for it represents more than mere relief, important as that is. Education must go on no matter what the conditions are and in fact conditions such as now exist make carrying on still more important.⁹⁶

It was not only in Spain that education had to 'go on'. For Francesca, Emily Parker and their Quaker colleagues, the telling of the story was in itself an opportunity for educational intervention at home, as well as providing an essential fundraising mechanism, an aspect to which I will return in the second part of this chapter.

Francesca herself relished her time on the beach with the children and was grateful for the assistance given to them by nearby peasants, who were themselves suffering from acute food shortages. Writing of the experience in *Margins of Chaos* she described how hard it was to believe the horror and the war existed at all, writing that: 'Sometimes the camp was very idyllic and I was happier than I had ever been in Spain'.⁹⁷ Again her romanticism came into play and she considered the peasants 'un-spoilt' simplicity and un-English way of living as a reflection of a better way of life. Writing of the fishermen who took it upon themselves to cook and provide other care for her and the children she maintained that:

In England this kind of integrity is rare. Perhaps it is difficult to preserve in an urban civilisation. Most people, at least at some time in their lives, feel insecure and inferior and try to be like those they consider superior to themselves. If they are intellectuals they are terrified of having the wrong tastes, of using the wrong formulae; if they are workers or lower middle class, they want to live like good bourgeois.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ MML, IBA, Box D-2: AJ/1

⁹⁷ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 211

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Reading these lines one is reminded of the subject of the annual debate that she chaired between the girls of her school and the boys of King Edwards on 15th March 1937, 'This House is sick of England', and it is difficult not to read a desire for escape into her motivation to leave for Spain a few days later.⁹⁹

Back in Birmingham for the autumn term of 1938 she was increasingly aware of the deteriorating conditions in Spain, particularly the difficulties of obtaining food and supplies for her two colonies, and was forced to raise money to support them herself as the AFSC had its hands full dealing with the worsening food shortages.¹⁰⁰ On her return to Spain at Christmas 1938 she was profoundly depressed by the hunger and atmosphere in Barcelona, and strongly sensed that the end was near, despite accusations of defeatism from her fellow relief workers.¹⁰¹ Even visiting her colonies and the children's hospital in Murcia did not shake her 'sense of doom' and fear for the fate of her Spanish friends, a feeling only strengthened by the Italian bombing of the harbour minutes after her ship departed on her return trip to England in the middle of January 1939.¹⁰²

Her fears were well founded and in *Margins of Chaos* she later recalled how Emily Parker reported the disappearance and almost certain shooting of their friends - the school inspector 'Don Marcelino', who had assisted her to establish Crevillente, and 'Manolo', chair of the Refugee Committee in

⁹⁹ ECECG, *School Magazine*, 1937 p 27

¹⁰⁰ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 214

¹⁰¹ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 216-7

¹⁰² Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 219

Murcia.¹⁰³ Francesca reported that the American Quakers returned the children at the Crevillente and Benidorm colonies to their families, or where they had none provided for them by other, unspecified, means.¹⁰⁴ The children's hospital was closed by the new authorities and the children 'evacuated' to the Provincial Hospital.¹⁰⁵ In May 1939 most of the American Quakers left Murcia and crossed the border into France taking most of their office records with them leaving only Emily Parker who remained in Murcia until October 1939 when the Franco regime finally made it impossible for even limited Quaker relief to continue.¹⁰⁶

It was in France that the work continued. The fall of Barcelona on 26th of January 1939 and the surrender of Madrid on 28th of March sent hundreds of thousands of Republican refugees fleeing for the border, which was initially closed by the French authorities. Finally the volume of people was so great that they had to relent and by the end of April 1939 over 450,000 Spanish refugees had crossed into France, roughly a third of whom comprised of the

¹⁰³ I am grateful to Antonio Viñao Frago for his enquires in Murcia concerning the names 'Manolo' and 'Don Marcelino' which Francesca uses in *Margins of Chaos*, neither of whom could be identified. The names do not appear in the FSC records either and it is likely that both names are pseudonyms; 'Manolo' for example is probably Manuel Delgado or possibly Montalban, or occasionally a combination of both men. Francesca also consistently uses the pseudonym or alias 'Rubio' for Gerardo Ascher, a fact which is unsurprising when one considers that the book was first published in 1944 only five years after the end of the Civil War. This was not an unfounded precaution as there is evidence that people who assisted the Quakers with their humanitarian relief were punished by the Franco regime; their driver Sidney alias Santiago Smilg, was imprisoned in Murcia and Madrid for many years (information supplied by Clara Smilg May 2005). For information on the post-war Francoist reprisals see among others Paul Preston, *The Politics of Revenge: Fascism and the Military in twentieth-century Spain* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1990); Paloma Aguilar, "Agents of memory: Spanish Civil War veterans and Disabled Soldiers", in Jay Winter & Emmanuel Sivan, eds., *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp 84-103; on the fate of Republican children in particular see Michael Richards, "Ideology and the Psychology of War Children in Franco's Spain, 1936-1945", in Kjersti Ericsson & Eva Simonsen, eds., *Children of World War II: The Hidden Enemy Legacy* (Oxford: Berg, 2005) pp 115-37

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 221

¹⁰⁵ Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief*, p 119; Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 221

¹⁰⁶ Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief*, pp 109-21

elderly, women and children.¹⁰⁷ Conditions were appalling. Edith Pye writing from Perpignan on 29th of January to Hilda Clark described the situation and the experiences of Francesca's friend, Dr. Audrey Russell, on the road:

It is a really terrible tragedy here - up till today the pass leading to Spain has been one solid block of refugees, of all ages, wounded soldiers, etc., and I understand they spent the nights standing, as one stands in the tube at rush hours...These poor people have absolutely no shelter - it poured in buckets all last night and thou can imagine what it was like...Dr Audrey [Russell] Ellis [sic] had an awful time in a car on the road full of refugees that they were bombing and machine-gunning. She was alone and said the road was full of bodies of refugees.¹⁰⁸

When Francesca later arrived in Perpignan Audrey Russell summarised her experiences on the journey to France with a rare comment illustrating the emotional toll that relief work could take on the individuals involved. Russell reported that she had 'seen such awful things that I have no feeling left. I have become an automaton. I am very busy - I do things, but it is like sleep-walking'. To which Francesca replied 'let's pretend you haven't anyway'.¹⁰⁹

Francesca had set off for France as soon as school closed for the Easter holiday, motivated by horrific reports in the press and her concern for Gerardo Ascher ('Rubio') who, as an exiled German Jew and anti-Fascist, was in a perilous position when Crevillente had to close. After reaching France problems with his permits eventually found him in Argelès camp near Perpignan, one of the largest beach concentration camps for Spanish refugees

¹⁰⁷ Marrus, *The Unwanted*, p 191

¹⁰⁸ Pye, *War and its Aftermath*, p118, this letter is also reproduced in Fyrth and Alexander, *Women's Voices*, pp 327-8

¹⁰⁹ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 222-3

in Southern France.¹¹⁰ Francesca, taken to the camp by Audrey Russell, was horrified by what she saw:

It is impossible to imagine what eighty thousand men herded together behind barbed wire looked like if one hasn't seen it. I wanted to cover my eyes - it was a sight so wounding to human dignity. Men penned into cages like wild animals; exposed to the stare of the passer-by, like cattle in the market place.¹¹¹

They finally found Gerardo 'still dressed in his blue overalls and looking astonishingly bright and clean amongst that drab multitude' and she promised to try and obtain a visa for him for England. A short while later a letter in the FSC files indicates that he was released; on 7th June Dorothy Thomson wrote from London to Audrey Russell at Perpignan stating intriguingly that 'Gerardo Ascher was in yesterday, and amused us with his rescue by you and [Dermot] O'Donovan' but unfortunately she failed to give any further details.¹¹²

In France Francesca set about undertaking similar initiatives to those that she had successfully developed in Murcia, working alongside others who had previously been in Spain including Audrey Russell, Mary Elmes and Marjorie Griffith. They encouraged the cultural and educational networks which already existed in the men's camps through the supply of materials and musical instruments. For the women and children who were in holding camps with less existing organisation she again established workshops supplied with sewing machines and wool, and founded schools for the children. Despite having to return to school at the end of the holidays she spent her spare time

¹¹⁰ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/2, Dorothy Thomson to Barbara Wood, 10 March 1939; Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 221

¹¹¹ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 225

¹¹² FL, FSC/R/SP/3/4, Dorothy Thomson to Audrey Russell, 7 June 1939

corresponding with her co-workers, writing to *The Manchester Guardian* about the conditions in the camps and appealing for books and cultural materials. Her efforts were obviously successful as the FSC file includes a note requesting that £303 from the Birmingham Help for Spanish Children Committee was to be used: 'For work in Camp in France started by Francesca Wilson'.¹¹³ At the end of May Dorothy Morris, who had known Francesca in Murcia, wrote from Perpignan of her continuation of the work started by Francesca and the joy brought about by the receipt of one item in particular:

I have sent Francesca a statement of how her money has been spent. I have started 6 carpenters at work building cupboards for school, taller [workshop], etc. and the taller of 6 girls sewing and directing the small girls activities who have already made themselves 100 odd batas and are now outfitting themselves with underwear. The school is now equipped with stationary and blackboard etc. and there is a milk service going for children.

There is also a football team, having received a football from Francesca's fund. Some of the boys were given permission by the commandant to go out last week and play the local boys team at Elne, with whom they drew a match. They are in high hopes of tacking [sic] Perpignan soon. They swarmed around me with such complete delight that the 100 odd francs for the ball, I felt, was never better spent. Unfortunately their footwear doesn't match the new football, but perhaps we will be able to rectify that soon.¹¹⁴

By August Francesca had returned to France and we find her in Perpignan fretting about 14 cases of clothing and musical instruments which had been sent out from Birmingham but which had not yet arrived.¹¹⁵ However, wider events in Europe were soon to change her life dramatically again. Listening to the wireless in Perpignan on 1st September 1939 she heard that Germany had

¹¹³ *The Manchester Guardian*, 9 May 1939; FL, FSC/R/SP/3/4, letters 30 May, 21 June and 1 July 1939

¹¹⁴ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/4, Dorothy Morris to Dorothy Thomson, 26 May 1939

¹¹⁵ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/4, Marjorie Griffiths to Dorothy Thomson, 29 August 1939

invaded Poland.¹¹⁶ In Birmingham meanwhile the outbreak of war had prompted her school to evacuate to Attingham Park in Shropshire and the Governors' patience with Francesca had finally run out. On 25th September the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the school's Council of Governors decided that as Miss Wilson 'had not put in an appearance at the beginning of term' she was deemed to have 'terminated her agreement with the College'.¹¹⁷ By the 16th October Francesca was in Paris on her way to Hungary with Dermot O'Donovan and Richard Rees, all three sent by the Friends to work with Polish refugees fleeing the German invasion.¹¹⁸

II - 'It was light struggling with darkness',¹¹⁹

from Francesca chose to tell her Spanish story in a number of different ways, in reportage in *The Manchester Guardian*, *The Daily News*, *The Birmingham Post* and *The Friend*, in autobiographical accounts of her experiences of relief, and in her autobiographical narrative published posthumously by her niece.¹²⁰ To complement these published texts there is also an unpublished 'archive' of diaries, correspondence, photographs and other papers. As with all historical texts her writings have to be read in the social and political contexts of their production and as I moved beyond her published accounts into the contextual archival material it became apparent that at times there are conflicts between Francesca's 'authorised' version and the story that emerges the archive; that the published accounts contain occasional inconsistencies of fact or

¹¹⁶ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 231

¹¹⁷ BA&H, MS 2278, ECECG, minutes 25 September 1939, pp 607-608

¹¹⁸ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/4, Marjorie Griffiths to Emily Hughes, 16 October 1939

¹¹⁹ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 200

¹²⁰ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 93

chronology. Reading her account of her first journey to Spain in *Margins of Chaos*, for example, the reader would assume that she travelled alone at the end of March 1937 and, after spending a day or two in Barcelona, continued on her journey south. It is a very brief description of a journey that actually took over three weeks between 25th March and 17th April and there is no mention of travelling companions. Furthermore, events from the journey appear to be inserted later in her narrative in *Margins of Chaos*, disrupting the actual chronology of her time in Spain. In one such instance, for example, after describing her early work feeding Malagan refugees in Murcia she went on to describe a visit to Madrid:

I had to go to Valencia to arrange for regular supplies for the Murcia breakfasts. While I was there, I fitted in a visit to Madrid. I went with an English journalist and the head mistress of a well-known London school in an army car.¹²¹

This version of events disagreed with the chronology of Grant's account and is also at odds with the evidence of correspondence in the Spain files in the Friends Library. She did indeed visit Madrid with Muriel Davies, the head mistress referred to in the above quotation, but it took place earlier during the journey and with Grant. They arrived there on the 11th April, a week before Davies and Grant flew back to England on the 17th April, and before Francesca had set foot in Murcia. Interestingly, Grant is not referred to at all in Francesca's account of the journey, a somewhat surprising omission given that it was Grant who facilitated visits to schools and colonies and provided Francesca with introductions to educationalists, such as Xirau, Aguilar,

¹²¹ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 176

Margarita Comas and other activists who appear in Francesca's book. So how can one explain these inconsistencies between Francesca's published text and the archive?

The explanation lies in Francesca's motives for disseminating her account to a public audience. She constructed her texts with a particular purpose in mind and consciously used the political and educational capital of both her own life experiences, and those of displaced children and adults, to argue the case for her particular brand of humanitarian relief work and, later, political issues around displacement and immigration policy. Both *Margins of Chaos*, published in 1944, and *Aftermath*, published in 1947, are constructed as autobiographical manifestos for her particular kind of educational relief work, a theme to which I will return in the following chapter.

Another related reason lies in the fact that she prided herself on being an intellectual and a writer. As we have seen she specified writing as one of the three defining activities of her life alongside teaching and relief work, and the literary style of her work was important to her even if the main impetus for its creation was political or educational.¹²² She was prepared to take artistic liberties with historical fact if that meant telling a better, more effective, story. In her later biographical notes on Nikolai Bachtin, for example, she described how she incorporated some of his speech and views from the 1930s and 1940s into her recollections of Russian famine relief in *Margins of Chaos*, writing that 'B

¹²² Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 131

did not mind me cheating a little and putting him and some of his talk into my memories of Moscow in 1923'.¹²³

This revelation is significant in the light of her practice of using episodes from the life histories of named individuals, and seemingly verbatim extracts from their conversations, as empathetic exemplars to bring her experiences to life and illustrate the messages she wishes to convey to her audience. These 'eye-witness' vignettes, such as the stories of the children in Benidorm quoted earlier, serve as a device both to engage her audience and elicit their sympathy, and to emphasise the truthfulness of her account. The effect of her casual remark about Bachtin is that it casts suspicion on these episodes although it is impossible at this stage to determine how many, or which, may have been mediated for literary or political effect. Many of them were undoubtedly based in fact as she certainly kept detailed diaries in which she recorded lengthy extracts from conversations and she described how a box full of letters and diaries preserved by her sisters served as the basis for writing *Margins of Chaos*.¹²⁴ Unfortunately as many of these diaries and letters have either not survived or are not in the public domain, a careful cross reading between texts is not possible.

The interesting question in this case however is not which elements are 'truth' and which are 'fiction' but whether this distinction matters? Does the knowledge that she may have adapted historical facts make her account invalid as historical 'truth' or take away from the validity of her evidence as a

¹²³ UoBSC, US5 Box 9 File IV; see Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp166-9 for the Russian extracts referred to here.

¹²⁴ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p vii

whole? Does it, for example, lessen the importance of her testimony about the experiences of children and refugees of war and displacement? As discussed in the introductory chapter of this study, autobiographical accounts have long been recognised as occupying 'the borderline between fact and fiction' and there are a number of comparable examples of women activists engaging in varying degrees of autobiographical fictionalisation to further a particular cause.¹²⁵ Steedman in her analysis of Kathleen Woodward's narrative of her working class childhood, *Jipping Street*, argued that the motive underlying the construction of an account blurs the distinctive boundaries between autobiography, case history and psychological narrative with the result that 'truth and order do not matter in the same way. If the events described are falsified, the reader still ends up with the same story in the end'.¹²⁶

This tension between a strictly accurate factual autobiographical account and conveying a deeper meaning can be seen more explicitly in the writing of another Quaker relief worker. Margaret McNeill (1909-1985) was originally from Northern Ireland and became a Quaker by conviction. She worked in displaced persons camps with the Friends Relief Service in Germany, 1945-48, and then with the Friends Relief Council in Brunswick, 1949-52, before taking up a post at Woodbrooke Quaker College in Birmingham where she remained until 1971 when she returned to Northern Ireland and became involved in the peace movement in Ulster.¹²⁷ She wrote about conditions in Germany for *The Manchester Guardian* and in 1950 published a book entitled *By the Rivers of*

¹²⁵ Cosslett, Lury & Summerfield, *Feminism and Autobiography*, p 1; see also Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses*; Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain*; Rousmaniere, *Citizen Teacher*

¹²⁶ Steedman, *Past Tenses*, p 125

¹²⁷ Oldfield, *Women Humanitarians*, pp 147-8

*Babylon: A story of relief work among the Displaced Persons of Europe.*¹²⁸

Her motivation was to demonstrate the shared common humanity of her readers and the displaced by telling:

a straightforward, unvarnished story of one relief worker's experiences among those unhappy exiles of the mid-twentieth century, the "displaced persons" - human beings no whit different from human beings in Tooting and Sunderland, Balham and Buxton, save that they happen to have been unfortunate enough to be born Poles, Ukrainians, or Balts, and to have been bereft of home and country through the vicissitudes of totalitarian warfare.¹²⁹

Her aim was to increase understanding of the human dimension of displacement. However, she struggled to identify a genre that would do justice to conveying the complexities of the relationship between relief worker and displaced person, and rather than a 'factual' autobiography therefore, her book is described on the dust jacket as 'a human document rather than a documentary record'.¹³⁰ It reads like a novel, complete with a list of 'Characters in the Story' at the back of the volume.¹³¹ The displaced person is taken as a 'symbolic figure' in whom 'we may see our own malaise writ large'.¹³² She was aware that this use of a semi-fictional form would prompt questions about the book's authenticity and pre-empted the reader's question: 'Is the story really true?' by rehearsing her answer in advance:

My first impulse is to answer unhesitatingly, 'Yes.' But then I pause. Can I claim as true a story in which details regarding the actual time and place of many incidents have been arbitrarily altered, in which separate

¹²⁸ Margaret McNeill, *By The Rivers Of Babylon: A story of relief work among the Displaced Persons of Europe* (London: The Bannisdale Press, 1950)

¹²⁹ Ibid., dust jacket

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., pp 230-1; in her introduction she explains that all the names are fictionalised.

¹³² Ibid.

episodes have frequently been joined together, and in which the characters and events are but a selection from a wealth of material at my disposal? Yet all these were but the modifications necessitated by the form in which I have tried, so far as in me lies, to give a true picture of the Displaced Persons.¹³³

The book was reviewed in *The Manchester Guardian* by Francesca who praised McNeill for her lack of sentimentality, and for her 'intense feeling for personality' in producing an account which 'reads like a novel and holds the attention from the first page to the last'.¹³⁴ She closed the review with the comment that McNeill's 'compassionate heart' was with those 'who are still left behind, still homeless and despairing'.¹³⁵

In the same way, when reading Francesca's accounts therefore we should recognise that her humanitarian and political motivation for telling the story was paramount, and that what we have is her version of the larger 'truth' as she saw it, told from her situated perspective as a woman educator activist in a particular context. Her aim in writing was not simply to record an interesting life story but to use her experiences to influence policy and public opinion, both to raise much needed funds for relief work, and to engage in the discourses surrounding displaced persons and humanitarian aid both in Spain and later during and after the Second World War. Despite inconsistencies of fact therefore, what emerges from Francesca's narrative when it is placed in the wider context of her life history is an overriding consistency of intention, agency

¹³³ Ibid., p 7

¹³⁴ *The Manchester Guardian*, 9 Feb 1951 p 4; in this review we see an example of the practice of a recognised female authority on relief favourably reviewing a publication by a lesser known colleague thereby conferring authority and substantiating a claim to knowledge, and, of course, lending her aid in promoting the publication to a wider audience. Francesca's own books were reviewed by among others Hilda Clark, Edith Pye and Bertha Bracey.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

and action. A consistency motivated by her lifelong commitment to the welfare and care of people who were displaced or suffering the effects of war and famine, and of the importance of educating the British public in their human rights.

Francesca's use of life histories was part of a wider discourse of aid in which the life stories of children were used and circulated in a similar fashion. As in Francesca's case, these vignettes frequently appear to directly incorporate the child's own voice, although again it is impossible to assess the degree of adult translation or mediation involved. The FSC *Bulletin* for example, reprinted personalised stories of individual children and adult refugees, reproduced from the correspondence or reports of relief workers in Spain, as a means of encouraging donations and demonstrating the value of the Friends' work. As with Francesca's writing, these vignettes can often be read as examples of the trauma of war and its psychological effect upon children. The *Bulletin* for 4th January 1937 evokes powerful ideas of 'home' and 'belonging' by telling of the 'shattered homes' of ten year old Anastasio Rodriguez and twelve year old Carmen Caras, before quoting a third unnamed child described as silent, shy and aged about five:

He uttered ingenuously the cause of his sadness in four words - "They turned me out." I asked from where. "From school and from home," he answered. The poor little chap felt a stranger everywhere, since he had lost his home. Lost homes! How much they mean, how much they account for!¹³⁶

¹³⁶ FL, FSC *Bulletin*, no. 3, 4 January 1937, p 2

It is clear from reading the correspondence of the relief workers, and Francesca is no exception, that they were very aware at the time of writing that their correspondence would be used in this way.¹³⁷ Similar episodes of political performance also appear in International Brigade publications, symbolising the just nature of the cause for which they had travelled to Spain. In *The Story of a Spanish Child* a child's letter is apparently reproduced in which Antonio Perez provides a brief autobiography, outlining the hardships and tragedies of his young life before his arrival in a colony where for the first time he enjoys all the elements deemed to be essential for a happy childhood:

I am very happy here, enough food and a good bed. I may say that my life has completely changed, we have play things, a library and affection. We take walk [sic] and study.

I am happy to feel this affection of the International comrades. My heart is also full of love for them who want to make us fit for a better future.¹³⁸

Francesca's depictions of the Benidorm children wishing to return home despite the privations are echoed by other Quaker workers; the Danish worker Elise Thomasen writing of her journey to the Rubí colony near Barcelona with a group of evacuated children, for example, described one twelve year old boy hiding in the lorry in the hope of being able to return to his parents in Madrid. When found he cried for his parents before running off down the road, whereupon the colony doctor predicted his early return with the words: 'Oh, he

¹³⁷ In this sense their letters demonstrate similar characteristics to those identified by Ruth A. Miller in the letters of women missionaries, see Ruth A. Miller, "The Missionary Narrative as Coercive Interrogation: seduction, confession and self-presentation in women's 'letters home'", *Women's History Review*, 15, no. 5, (2006) pp 751-771

¹³⁸ *Los Niños Españoles y Las Brigadas Internacionales*, ([Barcelona]: Comité Pro-Niños Españoles de las Brigadas Internacionales, [1938]), LSEA, Spanish Civil War Collection, Misc 91 volume 42/4, microfilm 517. Antonio's letter is reproduced alongside another letter from an International Brigader to his own son at home explaining why he is in Spain, presumably included to ensure that the resonances and parallels between children in Spain and the readers' own families were not lost on the audience.

will come back soon...I am used to these cases'.¹³⁹ Such use of a child's 'voice' or testimony by activists and reformers was of course not new, and there are a number of earlier examples in which one also senses a similar tension to that which exists in Francesca's writing between the need to depict the children as passive victims for political or fundraising purposes, and representing the children as self-reliant and active agents. It was used, for example, by Eglantyne Jebb in the SCF's campaigns to counter child starvation in Europe after the First World War. In a piece entitled 'Life Stories of Hungarian Children' she wrote that:

The little autobiographies which have been written by fifty pupils in the Save the Children Fund workrooms in Budapest...explain more clearly than could be explained by any number of dry, statistical, adult written reports, both the need to bring succour to the starving children of the slums and the soundness of the system which has been adopted with this end in view.¹⁴⁰

The same device is seen in the work of the author, suffrage activist, and humanitarian aid worker Evelyn Sharp (1869-1955), and the American Quaker journalist and author Anna Louise Strong (1885-1970) both of whom undertook relief work with the Friends in war-torn and famine areas in the 1920s and 30s.¹⁴¹ This interaction between the activist and the international audience is

¹³⁹ FL, FSC/R/SP/1/2, "Report on Rubí Colonies, sent to Henry van Etten, Paris and Horace Alexander, Birmingham", from Elise Thomasen at Barcelona, 26 July 1937. Thomasen adds that he was not the only one to suffer from homesickness and that the effect on the older children, particularly the girls, was more pronounced than that on the youngest, describing how she 'was constantly that day surrounded by 4 or 5 of them, who wanted to be petted or just to be near to some grown up person, whom they knew a little'. Rubí was part funded by Birmingham Quakers.

¹⁴⁰ Eglantyne Jebb, "Life Stories of Hungarian Children", *The Record of the Save the Children Fund*, 3, no. 1 (1922) pp 27-32

¹⁴¹ Evelyn Sharp, *Unfinished Adventure: Selected Reminiscences from an Englishwoman's Life* (London: John Lane Bodley Head, 1933); John, *Evelyn Sharp*, pp 97, 138, 166; John traces this technique in the earlier writings of the journalist Charles Russell and of Margaret McMillan. Similar techniques had been in use by philanthropic and charitable organisations since at least

crucial to understanding Francesca's representation of the conflict and the contradictory tensions in the representations of the children. For the target audience at home it was the eye-witness testimony of the humanitarian and political campaigners and the international journalists in Spain which provided unequivocal proof of both the desperate need for humanitarian intervention and of the Republic's reforming and modernising credentials. Myers has recently demonstrated both the effectiveness of, and similar ambiguities and tensions implicit in, activists' representations of the Spanish children evacuated to Britain during the Civil War.¹⁴² This is not to argue that Francesca's sole motivation for the use of vignettes was political and humanitarian. She did have a passionate interest in listening to people's stories and a lively curiosity about the background of the people with whom she was working and their previous lives. This was part of the attraction of relief work for her - the opportunity to learn about different peoples, their histories and their culture, a theme to which I will return in the next chapter when discussing her motivation.

Despite the undoubted effectiveness of the written testimonies cited above, the Spanish Civil War is notable for its mass utilisation of an even more powerful method of communication and representation. When in Vienna Francesca had developed a lively awareness of the power of the visual. The following quotation from Grant's account of their early visit to Spain illustrates that she was quick to realise both the potential of photography for humanitarian

the early nineteenth century. See also Anna Louise Strong, *Children of the Revolution* (Seattle: Piggott Printing Concern, 1925). Strong describes Quaker famine relief in Russia and tells the story of the John Reed children's colony on the Volga. The booklet was intended to raise further funds for its financial support and not only uses the same life story method but also confers a high level of agency upon the children. A similar use of the reported speech of the participating children is found in Mary Buchanan, *The Children's Village: The Village of Peace*, (London: The Bannisdale Press, 1951) where as with the Spanish examples we see the power of the 'voice' and the image combined, pp 18, 26

¹⁴² Myers, "The Ambiguities of Aid and Agency", pp 29-46

campaigns, and the power of positive images as well as photographs depicting death and suffering:

Francesca took a great many photographs of the children. Two little girls were so absorbed in reading books that they did not realise that they were being photographed, but when they did they demanded to have their dolls taken too.¹⁴³

Through reportage and photography Francesca participated in a lively 'network of collection and exchange' of visuals and texts for propaganda and fundraising purposes by a range of political activists and humanitarian relief organisations during the conflict.¹⁴⁴ References in the correspondence in the FSC archives show that images taken in southern Spain were sent to the AFSC offices in Philadelphia for wider distribution.¹⁴⁵ The Friends, like other agencies, made widespread use of photographs of children in their fundraising, the FSC files include numerous references to the demand for images from America, Britain and elsewhere and we saw earlier how the Birmingham Friends asked Francesca to source new photographs for their campaigns whilst she was in Spain.¹⁴⁶ Figure 16 illustrates how such images would be used in local campaigns. This use of images is also reflected in Francesca's choice of images to illustrate *Margins of Chaos* where she reproduced images of smiling children at breakfast in Pablo Iglesias (figure 11) alongside a photograph of a British nurse holding an emaciated baby in the Murcia Hospital (and Russian

¹⁴³ CUL, MS ADD 8251/II, visit to Pedralbes Colony near Barcelona, in typescript report on Spain by Helen Grant, March-April 1937, p 16

¹⁴⁴ The term is drawn from Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: photographs, anthropology and museums*, (Oxford: Berg, 2001)

¹⁴⁵ FL, FSC/R/SP/5 for example includes a list of negatives sent to Philadelphia.

¹⁴⁶ For example FL, FSC/R/SP/1/2, letter from Elise Thomsen at Barcelona to FSC, 2 July 1937, states that they receive a regular flow of letters from Paris requesting 'descriptions and pictures' of colonies and that she and her colleague Alfred Jacob have found a helper to go around taking photographs.

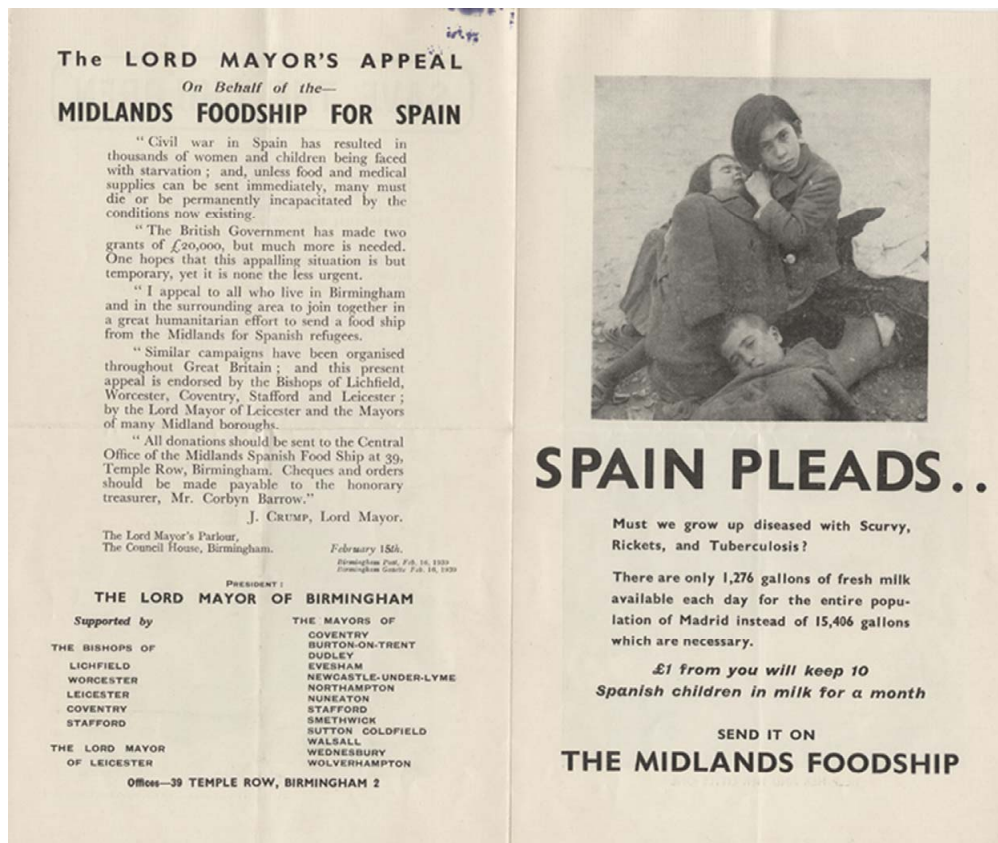


Figure 16: Fundraising leaflet issued in Birmingham, BA&H, Acc 2008/51

children clearly showing the effects of famine) under the caption 'Hungry children in Russia and Spain'.¹⁴⁷ The hungry children are in obvious contrast with her other Spanish photographs in the book which show well-cared for children in a colony school-room in Catalonia, healthy happy looking boys at work in Crevillente (figure 15), and pretty, well-dressed children standing outside the hospital or sitting in the sun with their toys (figure 13), all representing the power of humanitarian intervention and the difference that collective and individual agency could make to children's lives. Her participation in a network of exchange is indicated by her inclusion of images

¹⁴⁷ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, opposite p 176

which are replicated in the wider visual archive of the conflict which was created and collected by similar activists and which now resides in British archival institutions.¹⁴⁸

One such collection, the International Brigade Archive (IBA) at the Marx Memorial Library in London includes a large number of photographs gathered by activists in Spain and by historians subsequently researching the conflict.¹⁴⁹ Although none of the images have a proven connection to Francesca they provide a useful contextual tool for understanding her motivations and the wider discourse of representation in which she participated.¹⁵⁰ Their content mirrors her descriptions of model schools and colonies so closely that indeed many of them could have been taken specifically to illustrate pieces that she wrote. We see images of the boys and girls in the airy modern classrooms of Escuela del Mar as described by her and Grant, and scenes showing the use of a printing press to produce the beautiful school magazine with which she was so impressed, a copy of the magazine sits alongside the photographs in the IBA illustrating both its appeal and the way in which it was used to win over

¹⁴⁸ Some of the images used in *Margins of Chaos* are to be found among the wider visual archive of the conflict such as a feeding canteen in Barcelona included among the IBA in the MML, and an image of refugees crossing the border into France in the archive of the activist Winifred Bates at the IWM.

¹⁴⁹ The IBA is an artificially constructed archive in the sense that the images do not share an original provenance. The material was gathered by the International Brigade Association, established by the British volunteers in 1938, and presented to the MML in 1975. Since this initial deposit the archive has been added to by subsequent gifts of personal collections amassed by individual activists. The archive also includes material gathered together by Jim Fyrrh in the process of writing his study of the Aid Spain movement in Britain and his subsequent book with Sally Alexander on the role of women from English speaking countries in the conflict. For details of the collection see *International Brigade Memorial Archive: Catalogue 1986*, Vol 1. (London, Marx Memorial Library, 1986). For a further discussion of these images and the contexts of their production see Sian Roberts, "The Spanish Civil War and the politics of the visual: aid and the representation of displaced children in refugee colonies", *Paedagogica Historica*, forthcoming.

¹⁵⁰ The images discussed here comprise of 128 photographs gathered together as file D in box A2 of the IBA.

visiting educationalists and activists.¹⁵¹ The images of the colonies also correspond to Francesca's positive descriptions, and the overwhelming impression given is of happy and healthy children living in beautiful surroundings and engaging in a daily round of lessons, meal-times, communal chores, cultural activities and play, albeit in an institutional setting.

In contrast to the atrocity photographs also found in the archive the beauty and intimacy of the photographs of schools and colonies is striking, and it is not hard to appreciate their power as fundraising and publicity images.¹⁵² Indeed when I first looked at the two photographs reproduced here I was profoundly conscious of being manipulated by the beauty and intimacy of the images before me, and the clever use of recognisable documentary photographic techniques from the period. Scanning quickly through the images I was drawn by the gaze of the pretty little girl who is the central focus of the photograph reproduced here as figure 17. Closely watched by two other little girls she is the only one of the children who returns the photographer's gaze, with a look that is both curious and knowing, displaying an acute awareness 'of being looked at'.¹⁵³ I turned the page and was entranced by the sunlight falling on the faces of the three boys in figure 18. All three are laughing at something, or someone, beyond the frame of the image; their clothing, facial expressions, comradely body language and the rural background all suggesting a healthy, hard working and happy life. Both of the images appear to be part of a series

¹⁵¹ See quotation on page 191 of this study.

¹⁵² The IBA also includes images of the Escuela after its destruction by enemy air strikes and numerous 'atrocity' photographs of children killed and maimed in the conflict.

¹⁵³ Diane Waggoner, 'Photographing Childhood: Lewis Carroll and Alice', in Marilyn R. Brown, ed., *Picturing Children: Constructions of Childhood between Rousseau and Freud* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002) 149-66 p 149



Figure 17: Girls in a colony, MML, IBA, Box A/2, File D/17



Figure 18: Boys in a colony, MML, IBA, Box A/2, File D/18

taken at an unidentified colony and the visual conventions used recall the photographs of the best known Civil War photographer Robert Capa, whose trademark use of a child's eye contact with the camera created a powerful sense of intimacy between the child, the photographer and the viewer.¹⁵⁴ Stylistically and aesthetically they have a very different feel to snapshots taken by activists such as Francesca. Contextual information for the IBA images is scarce; the name of the colony is known, or guessed, in only a few instances and individual children are not named. If removed from the archival frame of the IBA file nothing in their internal composition would indicate that they are photographs of refugee children displaced by a brutal civil war.

The aesthetic quality of these images, and their similarities both to Francesca's writings and her own use of photographs, provoke a number of questions about their validity as historical sources, the 'truth' of the story they tell and of the representation of the children seen in them. On one level the photographs could be read as a representational portrait of daily life and activities in the colonies in the same way as Francesca's eyewitness descriptions. However,

¹⁵⁴ The best known example is probably Capa's much reproduced photograph of a young refugee girl lying on sacks taken in Barcelona in January 1939. See Juan Pablo Fusi Aizpúrua, Richard Wheelan & Catherine Coleman, eds., *Heart of Spain: Robert Capa's Photographs of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Aperture, 1999); Cornel Capa & Richard Wheelan, eds., *Children of War, Children of Peace: Photographs by Robert Capa* (Boston: Bullfinch Press, 1991). Figure 18 also utilises what Mendelson has referred to as 'the iconic status of the peasant' used repeatedly in photographs, documentary film, postcards and posters of the Civil War period to represent both the contribution of rural labour to the struggle and productivity and stability, see Jordana Mendelson, *Documenting Spain: Artists, Exhibition Culture, and the Modern Nation, 1929-1939* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005) pp 174-5. A pamphlet of political cartoons by Josep Obiols includes an image of three boys which is almost identical to the photograph in figure 18 except that one of the boys depicted is black, see Josep Obiols, *Auca Del Noi Català Antifeixista I Humà*. Comissariat de Propaganda de la Generalitat de Catalunya, Sabadell, 1937, LSEA, Spanish Civil War Collection, Misc 91 volume 27/3, microfilm 514. Published in Catalan, Spanish, French and English, the English title being *Life of a Catalan, Free As A Catalan's Must Be*. The English caption for the cartoon reads 'His religion is not cheap, it's a hearty comradeship'.

these images have an artistic quality and a sense of agency and performative intent that goes far beyond a factual representation of the day-to-day.¹⁵⁵

Several commentators have emphasised the ‘multi-vocal’ nature of images and the need to look to the context of their construction ‘outside the frame’ when exploring their multiple and often conflicting interpretations.¹⁵⁶ What lay beyond the frame of these images was a war in which visual imagery was deployed as a weapon of propaganda to great effect by both sides and this provides part of the context within which they should be read. As Brothers and others have argued, the Spanish conflict was the first war to be photographed for a mass audience. It coincided with the growth of documentary photojournalism in the 1930s and its deployment by newly founded magazines such as *Life* (1936) and *Picture Post* (1938).¹⁵⁷ The Spanish Republic was very keen to promote its reputation for progressive educational and welfare reforms and the visual, including documentary photography and film, was a key tool for communicating this message to an international audience and ‘proving’ the reality of its reforms.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ For a discussion of agency and performance of ethnographic images see Edwards, *Raw Histories*

¹⁵⁶ Jessica Evans & Stuart Hall, eds., *Visual Culture: the reader* (London: Sage, 1999) p 309; Ian Grosvenor, “On Visualising Past Classrooms”, in Ian Grosvenor, Martin Lawn & Kate Rousmaniere, eds., *Silences and Images: The Social History of the Classroom* (New York: Peter Lang Inc., 1999) 85-104 p 91

¹⁵⁷ Brothers, *War and Photography*; Brad Epps, “Seeing the Dead: Manual and Mechanical Specters in Modern Spain (1893-1939)”, in Susan Larson & Eva Woods, eds., *Visualizing Spanish Modernity* (Oxford: Berg, 2005) 112-41 p 134; see for example the photo essay of images from the Spanish conflict by Capa in *Picture Post*, 3 Dec 1938

¹⁵⁸ See Mendelson, *Documenting Spain*, pp 125-182. Mendelson argues that images of educational and welfare activities were given pride of place in the displays in the Spanish Pavilion in the 1937 International Exposition in Paris, popularly remembered for its inclusion of Picasso’s *Guernica*. The external and internal displays included, for example, images of children reading and scenes from the Pedagogic Missions of the early 1930s to maintain a precarious balance between the conflicting objectives of enlisting sympathy for an embattled government and people on the one hand, and representing stability, progress, and modernity on the other.

In a discussion of images of Norwegian school children, Rousmaniere demonstrates how seeing a photograph in the context of related images can challenge our tendency to assume knowledge based on one frozen moment and prompt different questions and interpretations of the 'reality' of the children's experience.¹⁵⁹ Reading the IBA images against Francesca's writings appears to confirm the idealistic view of the child's experience of colony life, although other sources in the FSC files occasionally point to varying standards of quality. Francesca's co-workers in Spain are on the whole extremely complimentary about the high standards maintained in the colonies, and even allowing for the inevitable deterioration and difficulties of securing food and items such as soap that developed as the war progressed, there are relatively few comments on poor quality colonies.¹⁶⁰ However, one intriguing comment occurs in a letter from Alfred Jacob to the FSC's London office, where he described a colony in Gerona with the phrase 'not a show-colony'.¹⁶¹ This raises inevitable questions about the itinerary that foreign visitors such as Francesca and Grant followed during their tours, and those colonies chosen to be photographed for fundraising or propaganda purposes. This, and the popularity of the Escuela del Mar with foreign visitors referred to above, suggest an organised itinerary of the best 'model' schools and colonies for international commentators. Despite this it should be remembered that Francesca undertook a significant amount of research into the colonies and

¹⁵⁹ Kate Rousmaniere, "Questioning the Visual in the history of education", *History of Education*, 30, no. 2 (2001) 109-16 pp 113-115

¹⁶⁰ FL, FCS/R/SP/1/2 includes an example in a letter of 7 October 1937 regarding a colony in a sea-side hotel, Vilajuhiga, where there was no running water and the sole responsible was out all day searching for food leaving no one to look after the children.

¹⁶¹ FL, FSC/R/SP/1/2, 11 Sept 1937

was, according to her account, also allowed considerable freedom during her visits:

I not only visited scores of these colonies up and down the country, from Puigcerda, in the Pyrenees, to the province of Almeria, in the south, but, as I was myself starting a form [sic] colony for boys at Crevellente, [sic] in the province of Alicante, I studied them closely, going in and out of them at all hours and talking to the teachers in charge and to the children, as well as consulting the delegates of the Ministry of Education as to their organisation and the guiding principles on which they are run. And the more I found out about them the more deeply I was impressed.¹⁶²

The 'guiding principles' to which she refers above are set out clearly in a published document, also preserved in the IBA, entitled *Children's Colonies* and there are many parallels between the 'ideal' recommendations set out in this text, the IBA photographs, and Francesca's descriptions.¹⁶³ Two aspects in particular deserve attention - the way in which the colonies were a means of educating the future citizens of Spain, and secondly their aesthetic characteristics and the beauty of the surroundings in which the children lived.

¹⁶² Wilson, "Social Work in War-Time Spain", MML, IBA, Box D-2: AM2

¹⁶³ National Council for Evacuated Children, Ministry of Public Education, Spanish Republic *Children's Colonies*, Valencia, November 1937, MML, IBA, Box A/5, File A/8, p 5. Another copy of this document can be found in the LSEA, Spanish Civil War Collection, Misc. 91, volume 18/5, microfilm 513. The National Council was originally established as the Committee on Colonies by the Spanish Republican Ministry of Education and the illustrated pamphlet opens with a copy of the Ministerial Order of P. D. W. Roces, Minister of Education and Health, 24 August 1937 creating the National Council for the 'supervision, of the organization, direction, scholastic curriculum and material support of all institutions for evacuated children in Spain as well as abroad'. *Children's Colonies* was published in French and English and the multilingual nature of the publication in itself reflects the presence of numerous foreign relief workers in Spain, and the Republic's desire to disseminate a progressive image to an international audience. The recommendations also allude to the importance of the visual as a means of communication stating that the 'standards and the publications, photographs and postal cards...bring out the constructive work realized in this realm by the Ministry of Education', *Children's Colonies*, 1937, p 3. A similar motive can be discerned in other sources for the period; the documentary film *Las Hurdes: Land Without Bread*, which depicted life in the Extremadura region and was originally made in 1933 by Luis Buñuel for example, was edited with sound in French and English in December 1936 with funding from the Spanish Embassy in Paris, see Mendelson, *Documenting Spain*, p 67

In her writings Francesca emphasised the way in which individual responsibility in a collective context was encouraged and citizenship education promoted through self-government by the children, describing 'parliaments' where children as young as five gathered together to discuss and decide upon issues such as 'a rearrangement of their lessons, the feeding of the chickens and rabbits, the assignment of domestic duties, the water supply'.¹⁶⁴ This representation of children having a measure of control over their lives is also borne out in the images from the IBA archive, which show children participating in committees.¹⁶⁵ That this was a conscious policy that colony administrators were expected to follow is reflected in *Children's Colonies* which makes explicit the colony's role in inculcating specific patterns of normative behaviour in the children to produce a new type of citizen for the future. These behavioural patterns touched almost all aspects of the child's life including health and hygiene, active citizenship, social interaction and cultural expectation. The colony was to foster in the children an ethos of co-operative participation and personal responsibility within a collective framework:

Care should be taken to organize the work of all the Colonies along cooperative lines, founded on the work which directly affects the collective. For example, with the girls, the bigger ones will help the smaller ones with their sewing, each taking over direction of one of them in making table linen, handkerchiefs, etc. All the children who are old enough will make their beds and clean their rooms and will do what has been assigned to them in the way of helping with the cleaning of the rest of the house. A weekly rotating schedule for waiting on tables should be drawn up. Whenever possible, work-teams should be formed to carry on the necessary work of the Colony - raising useful animals, agricultural work on the collective lands, construction or setting in order of necessary tools and furniture, laying in supplies, etc.

¹⁶⁴ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 198; see also CUL, MS ADD 8251/II, report on visit to Spain pp 36-37

¹⁶⁵ For example MML, IBA, Box A/2, photographs D/106 and D/107

In short, the whole life of the colony should be given a deep sense of cooperation, which will bring out the constructive and creative aspect of working in a group.

In this way will be developed in the children the feeling for solidarity and mutual combining individual efforts to form a real working Community. This should be the salient characteristic of every Colony.¹⁶⁶

This theme is also consistently reflected in the images which show groups of children working, learning and playing together. Although the colonies were co-educational, on the whole the work was still arranged along a traditionally gendered pattern; the girls undertaking housework, washing clothes and sewing and the boys engaging in agriculture, caring for animals and gardening.¹⁶⁷

Children's Colonies and the images also support Francesca's statements on the attention to design and material beauty in the colonies. It is very clear however that this was part of a programme of training the children in aesthetic appreciation and went alongside the 'civilising' benefits of training in the basic principles of personal hygiene and health as part of learning the behavioural norms of a cultured and civilised life. The children were to learn that attention to cleanliness and aesthetic considerations were both an essential part of the human condition, even in the most difficult of circumstances:

Whether the accommodations are luxurious or modest, the house should always have two characteristics: *cleanliness and good taste*. Arrange things so that even in the most rudimentary accommodations there will be some pleasing and attractive note such as a few simple pieces of pottery

¹⁶⁶ National Council for Evacuated Children, *Children's Colonies*, pp 13-4

¹⁶⁷ This is also reflected in the images although occasionally there appears to be a conscious effort to present a different picture as in a photograph of washing clothes at the Furnes 'Republic of Free Refugee Children' in 1938 which in the original album is captioned 'boys were made to share this work, which was regarded as most unusual,' IWM, Photographic Archive, HU33143

work or china produced in the vicinity, flowers, plants, a bookcase with books, etc. If the desire is there, means can be found to do this.¹⁶⁸

Every care was to be taken to ensure that this lesson was reinforced through the design and furnishing of the colonies. As Grant and Francesca had noticed, the children's communal dormitories had to be attractive and comfortable, with bedspreads in 'harmonious colours', and both women described houses with light and airy rooms situated in beautiful gardens and repeatedly stress the cleanliness and attention to design. Grant described a colony where beds were 'painted pale blue with designs of ducks or boats on them' and a dining room that was particularly attractive 'with yellow chairs and flowers everywhere', whilst Francesca went as far as stating that 'Many of the colonies looked as if they had been furnished by Heal or Gordon Russell'.¹⁶⁹

Reading Francesca's descriptions of the colonies alongside the guidelines and the images we see how she and Grant were engaging in a much wider discourse about the value of the Republican educational and welfare reforms, and the colonies in particular, as vehicles for delivering an utopian future. It also brings to the fore the potential for ambiguity and multiple and conflicting readings of all of these sources. On the one hand they can be read as part of a progressive discourse of educational reform and improvements in child health and welfare, which firmly projects the colonies as sites for educating the future,

¹⁶⁸ National Council for Evacuated Children, *Children's Colonies*, pp 7-8, emphasis in the original

¹⁶⁹ CUL, MS ADD 8251/II, pp 21-22; Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 172. It is worth noting that this stress on cleanliness is reinforced in the pamphlet by carefully chosen images, one captioned 'Washing her teeth', for example, shows a pretty and spotlessly clean young girl from Cuart de Poblet in Valencia cleaning her teeth in a scene reminiscent of advertising images for products such as Pears Soap, National Council for Evacuated Children, *Children's Colonies*, p 11

reflecting in Francesca's opinion, much needed modernism.¹⁷⁰ Similarly the depiction of the children's participation in labour and collective decision making represents the place that children could play in evolving a different and new world. A sense of active agency is conferred upon the children, who are represented as individual actors in their own right contributing to the relief effort on a practical level, through growing food and taking responsibility for their own care and that of younger children, and on an ideological level through their participation in the formulation of a new way of collective living.

On the other hand the colonies can equally be read as examples of sites of surveillance and discipline, 'social control in the name of enlightenment', subject to the 'controlling gaze' of photographers, foreign visitors and humanitarian activists.¹⁷¹ The use of photography as part of systems of surveillance and control is well documented and the colony images existed alongside a recording system that documented the child's physical and educational condition on entering the colony and monitored their progress while they were there.¹⁷² Rather than seeing the children as active agents as in the earlier reading, we now see passive subjects who are educated and

¹⁷⁰ This is particularly true in the case of the images which employ the relatively simplistic device, familiar to us from the iconography of the period, of using children to symbolise hope and renewal. Similar images and discourse can be found in children's 'communities', 'villages' and 'republics' founded by progressive educationalists associated with the New Education movement as a means of dealing with children displaced, or 'damaged' after the second world war such as, for example, photographs of the 'Children's Republic' at Moulin-Vieux par Laval-dens-Isère in France included in a special issue of *The New Era* in 1948, or images associated with the international Pestalozzi village at Trogen. Without further research it is impossible to say whether this post second world war progressive iconography was specifically influenced by the international circulation of images of the Spanish colonies, or whether they both have their origin in earlier utopian representations of children from the Soviet Union.

¹⁷¹ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1994) pp 382-3

¹⁷² See for example John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988)

‘civilised’ by ever-present teachers constantly supervising the children’s behaviour.

Interestingly, given the strictures on supervision in *Children’s Colonies*, both Francesca and Grant repeatedly commented on the children’s self-control and consequent lack of supervision which went hand in hand with self-government. In the Escuela del Mar they ‘noticed how quiet and orderly the children were yet there are no rules and the children share in the organising’.¹⁷³ Another secondary school, the Institute Escuela in Barcelona, had ‘No rules or restrictions other than those decided on by the children’, and at the colony in Pedralbes Grant was particularly struck by the fact that none of the children were in any kind of uniform and there seemed to be no obvious supervision in the garden at all, it was taken for granted that the children would behave properly.¹⁷⁴ Again, this is reflected in the images of the colonies which do not include adult figures.¹⁷⁵

This was not to disregard the influence of the adults however, both women commented on the beneficial role played by key adults in the children’s lives,

¹⁷³ CUL, MS ADD 8251/II, p 7. The school is described by Grant as a co-educational school in Barcelona which catered for children aged 5-14 years, run on lines inspired by Cossio, ‘something similar to the Dalton system’.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid pp15-16, 19

¹⁷⁵ Again this is open to multiple interpretations; it may serve to remind the viewer of the children’s vulnerable and displaced status, separated from their parents and reliant upon the altruistic care of the state. Janet Fink in her study of child imagery in British National Children’s Homes literature identifies a similar absence of adults, which she suggests was intended to convey to the viewer that despite the promotion of a ‘family-like’ atmosphere these were not ‘normal’ families, see Janet Fink, “Inside a hall of mirrors: residential care and the shifting constructions of childhood in mid-twentieth century Britain”, *Paedagogica Historica*, 44, no. 3 (2008) 287-307. However, the absence of adults can equally be read as a sign of the children’s autonomy, self-reliance and agency, capable of managing their own behaviour. On the lack of adults as a feature of the iconography of progressive education, see Catherine Burke & Ian Grosvenor, “The progressive image in the history of education: stories of two schools”, *Visual Studies*, 22, no. 2 (2007) pp 155-168

both as exemplary role models and providers of affection and love. It is clear for example that Angel Llorca set the tone at the Perollés colony near Valencia, inspiring the children with a sense of pride and hope:

Señor Llorca made a speech in which he explained the ideals of the colony - how they wished to turn the tragedy of war into the hope for the future; to give children a standard of life so that when they made homes for themselves they would have something to aim at. The children all seemed intensely proud of the colony.¹⁷⁶

There is an interesting tension in Francesca's representation of the colonies between presenting the children as autonomous active agents in their own right and drawing attention to their vulnerable and victim status in order to raise money for the cause. Again reading her account within the wider context of representations by other contemporary activists, and examining the images she chose to include in *Margins of Chaos* and her use of the children's life histories is illuminating and underlines her participation in a humanitarian culture of representation, where the construction of intimacy became a powerful textual and visual device.

Francesca's accounts, and those of other activists described here, were all constructed from the situated perspective of an adult who disseminated the child's story for a purpose, albeit with benevolent intentions, a fact which in itself inevitably invites the audience to question their 'truthfulness' and the silences that surround them. There is one body of material in which the children tell their own stories, described by one humanitarian activist at the

¹⁷⁶ CUL, MS ADD 8251/II, pp 36-37; see also Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 198

time as the 'autobiographic pages of unkept diaries'.¹⁷⁷ Teachers in the colonies encouraged the children to draw and many of their drawings survive in archival institutions.¹⁷⁸ Francesca herself referred very briefly to children drawing in the colonies but does not go into any detail, a surprising silence given her earlier fascination with Cizek and his pupils.¹⁷⁹ However, as with the photographs described earlier, reading her accounts against the children's drawings illuminates her use of life histories, the questions around their 'truthfulness', and the extent to which she mediated the conversations quoted in her texts. Before considering the content of the drawings however, there are significant issues around their biography as sources that need to be addressed. Although created by the children they share a similar performative element to the photographic sources discussed earlier in that the drawings were also presented through exhibitions and publications to an international audience for political and fundraising purposes and they survive in archival institutions because of their selection, collection and preservation by the same relief and political networks. Despite this, and the fact that they were often undertaken at the prompting of a teacher, who might also allocate a theme, they represent the 'voices' of some of the children in colonies at the moment of their creation.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ J.A. Weissberger, ed., *They Still Draw Pictures* (Spanish Child Welfare Association of America for the American Friends Service Committee, 1938) editorial [online] <http://www.orpheus.ucsd.edu/speccoll/tsdp> [Accessed 18 February 2006]

¹⁷⁸ For examples see Geist & Carroll, *They Still Draw Pictures*; Columbia University collection [online] <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/eresources/exhibitions/children> [Accessed 18 February 2006]; Mandeville Special Collections Library, University of California [online] <http://www.orpheus.ucsd.edu/speccoll/tsdp> [Accessed 18 February 2006]

¹⁷⁹ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 198

¹⁸⁰ 3000 drawings by children from the colonies were gathered together for a competition and exhibition in Valencia in May 1937, see MML, YC08/SPA, Holborn & West Central Committee for Spanish Medical Aid, *Spain: The Child and the War* (London, 1937). On this occasion the children, aged between 5 and 16 years old, were allocated the subject 'Individual Impressions of the War and life around', and prizes of paints, drawing materials and books were awarded to the best. The first prize, a copy of *Peter Pan*, went to 9 year old José Luis Benlluire, who is

In contrast to the earlier photographs which, as with many images of children invariably appear to have been taken on what one visual critic referred to as 'sunny days', the drawings provide glimpses of emotional trauma, grief and sadness that persisted even when the children had been safely ensconced in the colony for some time, and which echo feelings articulated in Francesca's vignettes.¹⁸¹ Although, as Stargardt has argued in the context of child art of the Holocaust, we should be careful not to over-read or collectivise experience based on a small sample, it is difficult not to agree with some of the commentators at the time who saw in the drawings 'an illustration of the psychological effect of war upon children'.¹⁸² Geist in his study of colony drawings argued that they represent 'perhaps the earliest evidence of organized art therapy' of the type later used with child survivors of concentration camps after the Second World War when one practitioner described drawings as 'documentary evidence of the emotional state' of the children with whom she worked.¹⁸³

The attachment to home and feelings of displacement that Francesca identified in Maria and Antonio earlier are also hinted at in a small album of drawings that made its way from Rubí, a colony near Barcelona, to Birmingham and that now resides alongside Francesca's letters and reports in the Friends Library

shown drawing with his prize winning entry, and who is described as the refugee son of an architect from Madrid. Over a hundred drawings were later selected for exhibition in England and the USA.

¹⁸¹ Carol Mavor, "Introduction: the unmaking of childhood", in Brown, *Picturing Children*, 27-41 p 39

¹⁸² Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives under the Nazis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005) p 271; see also Nicholas Stargardt, "Children's Art of the Holocaust", *Past and Present*, 161 (Nov 1998) pp 191-235; the quotation comes from *Spain: The Child and the War*, p 4

¹⁸³ Geist & Carroll, *They Still Draw Pictures*, p 24; Marie Paneth, "Notes on Drawing and Painting with Children from Concentration Camps", *The New Era* (July 1946) pp 179-182

(figures 19 and 20).¹⁸⁴ 'Colonia Birmingham' at Rubí was one of two colonies supported financially by the Birmingham Friends and the sending of the album to Birmingham reflected the attempts made by the colony's Spanish administrators to build a relationship between the children who lived there and the Friends who supported them financially.¹⁸⁵ The small, spiral bound album includes twenty-five crayon and pencil drawings, the majority signed by the children, the presence of their names in some small way countering the objectification of anonymity and reminding the viewer that each child had an individual personal identity and history.¹⁸⁶ A number of the drawings show scenes of war, captioned in the child's hand with titles such as 'milicianos', drawn by F. Martinez which depicts marching soldiers; the unsigned 'La Victima' showing a body hanging over a wall with its rifle lying on the floor; and 'propaganda fascista', again by F. Martinez, depicting a skeletal drummer beating his drum at the edge of a sheer cliff followed by a crowd bearing a flag and rifles. Most of the drawings are in pencil, reflecting the difficulties of obtaining school supplies that is described in the Friends' correspondence.¹⁸⁷ One of the few drawings in coloured crayon (figure 20) is signed by 'Ayala' and depicts a fleeing male figure carrying a red sack over his shoulder running away from a burning house. The image suggests the destruction and loss of

¹⁸⁴ FL FSC/R/SP/5. The colony was supported financially by Birmingham Quakers and the album is dedicated 'to the Quaker Friends' and inscribed 'Colonia Birmingham [sic] Asistencia Infantil Rubi, Los niños del grupo 'Helena' dedican estos dibujos con todo cariño [sic] los Amigos Cuaqueros'. A note on the cover records that it was received by the chair of the Birmingham support committee, Margaret Backhouse, who sent it to the FSC in London in February 1940.

¹⁸⁵ The responsables running the colony at Caldas, which was also supported by Birmingham Quakers, requested information about the city, such as postcards and the coat of arms, so that the children could appreciate where the funds came from, and there are also references to Quakers in Birmingham requesting permission to write to individual children, FL, FSC/R/SP/5, *Bulletin*, 16 p 2

¹⁸⁶ Richard Raskin, *A Child at Gunpoint: A Case Study in the Life of a Photo*, (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2004) p 98; Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, p10

¹⁸⁷ FL, FSC/R/SP/1/2, "Report on Rubí colonies" by Elise Thomasen, 26 July 1937



Figure 19: Cover of album, FL, FSC/R/SP/5



Figure 20: Drawing by Ayala, FL, FSC/R/SP/5

home and is similar to others identified by Geist as indicative of loss and separation.¹⁸⁸

Interestingly one Quaker visitor to Rubí described her impressions of the children's drawings in the FSC *Bulletin* with a remark that calls to mind Francesca's desire to rescue children from the areas of bombardment to the safety of her beach colony in Benidorm:

The drawings were very interesting - quite artistically done - only there were far too many planes and bombs. You felt sure the children had not forgotten - their imagination cannot forget these gruesome experiences, though most of them have been at the colony now for exactly a year.¹⁸⁹

In contrast, Geist noted the numerous drawings representing life in the colonies as stable and happy and suggesting a collective identity on the part of the children.¹⁹⁰ These drawings again recall Francesca's descriptions of colony life and include representations of playing children, plants and flowers, cheerful dining rooms with tables covered in colourful chequered tablecloths, and homes with smoke billowing from the chimneys.¹⁹¹ Other drawings support the anecdotal evidence of British visitors of happy events at the colony such as visits to the cinema, a weekly treat enjoyed by the children at Rubí.¹⁹²

Reading Francesca's texts against this range of contemporary representations illuminates her participation in a wider discourse of aid, a discourse in which a

¹⁸⁸ Geist & Carroll, *They Still Draw Pictures*, p 38

¹⁸⁹ FL, FSC/R/SP/5, *Bulletin*, 26, "Special Colony Number", 8 Sep 1938, p 2

¹⁹⁰ Geist & Carroll, *They Still Draw Pictures*, p 44

¹⁹¹ See for example Geist & Carroll, *They Still Draw Pictures*, plate 38

¹⁹² FL, FSC/R/SP/1/2, Alfred Jacob at Barcelona to FSC, 11 September 1937. There are a number of references to cinema visits by children in colonies including one which records great excitement over a Shirley Temple film.

number of conflicting and multiple identities were conferred upon refugees, and particularly on displaced children - from helpless victim of war to grateful recipient of international aid; from passive receptacle of enlightened state education to active agent of change in a better future. It is also a discourse that holds many resonances for our society today where child and adult victims of war and persecution alike are still represented in very similar ways by political and humanitarian agencies and by increasingly pervasive and powerful global media empires.

III - ‘...never did I work so happily or in a moral climate so propitious’¹⁹³

Only once or twice in my life have I felt such a bond between myself and a community, sometimes of children and sometimes of grown-ups as I did in Spain.¹⁹⁴

This quotation neatly summarises the sense of connection that Francesca felt with Murcia and its people, a strength of feeling confirmed by members of her family who recall that the relief work that gave her most pride, and which she recounted most frequently, was her time in Murcia.¹⁹⁵ This part of the chapter will explore why this was the case. What sort of place was Murcia for Francesca? How did her time there influence the trajectory of her life?

As we have seen her initial descriptions of Murcia were not complimentary. On her first visit she unflatteringly described the town as ‘one of the dirtiest and most backward in Spain’, a sentiment repeated in the quotation which provides

¹⁹³ Francesca M. Wilson, “Social Work in War-Time Spain: Impressions of a Relief Worker”, reprinted from *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 April 1938, by the Spanish Information Service, MML, IBA, Box D-2: AM2

¹⁹⁴ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 109

¹⁹⁵ Interview by the author with William Horder, 30 November 2006

the title for this chapter.¹⁹⁶ It did not have the attractive attributes of other places in which she had been active having, for example, none of the architectural magnificence or historical interest of Vienna. Rather its appeal lay in the people that she found there and the opportunities it provided for activism and autonomy.

She made a number of friends and colleagues in Murcia who inspired and facilitated her desire for activism and excitement. On her return to the city from an interlude in Alicante on 17th August 1937 Esther Farquhar wrote that they had 'a stream of callers for everybody wants to see the Inglesa who brought hope to the hearts of the refugees in Murcia'.¹⁹⁷ She herself was glad to return; whilst in Alicante her thoughts had 'often turned longingly to Murcia'.¹⁹⁸ She developed strong friendships with her American colleagues and the other relief workers with whom she collaborated, including Esther Farquhar, Emily Parker ('the staunchest of all' her 'allies'), and the New Zealand nurse Dorothy Morris who had 'the open, unself-conscious manner, the spontaneity and disregard of class distinction that made one realise at once that she had not been born in England'.¹⁹⁹ She also thrived on working with her Spanish collaborators; on her return to Murcia she 'immediately flew to Montalban for advice and aid', and found in him and Manuel Delgado reflections of her own interests and excitement at the prospect of new projects that seemed at first to be fraught with difficulties.²⁰⁰ She took great pleasure in the company of the children with whom she worked at both Crevillente and Benidorm, and later

¹⁹⁶ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 174

¹⁹⁷ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, letter from Esther Farquhar, 18-21 August 1937

¹⁹⁸ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 12 Sept 1937

¹⁹⁹ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 207, 218

²⁰⁰ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 12 Sept 1937

recalled that on occasions in Benidorm she 'was happier than I had ever been in Spain'.²⁰¹ Her joy and excitement of being in Murcia are encapsulated in her pleased words on her return: 'When I arrived I wondered that I had been able to stay away from it so long. People were so kind and welcoming - it felt like home'.²⁰²

The reference to Murcia feeling 'like home' is significant. As I will argue in the following chapter it was partly her desire to escape from home that had initially motivated her to engage in international relief in the first place and members of her family testify to her desire to 'escape' and her rare visits 'home' once she had established her own household.²⁰³ Similarly Murcia provided her with an escape from Birmingham where she had been living a settled existence for some twelve years, her longest period in any one place since she had first left home for Newnham at the age of seventeen, and a place from which she frequently chose to escape on weekends and school holidays. Her escape to Murcia enabled her to live a very different existence to the life that she led in Birmingham.

In this, of course, she was far from alone, there are numerous examples of middle class British women who found that travel and philanthropic work abroad enabled them to lead far more exiting and fulfilling lives than they could in Britain. Riedi, for example, demonstrated how the desire for adventure and travel, the chance to take part in world events, and the opportunity to escape

²⁰¹ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 211

²⁰² FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 12 Sept 1937

²⁰³ Interview by the author with William Horder her great-nephew, 30 November 2006, who used the word 'escape' when referring to her travels abroad; Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p iv

the restrictions of a Victorian life, all played a large part in the motivations of nurses and teachers in the South African war of 1899-1902 alongside more patriotic and philanthropic intentions.²⁰⁴ Travel could also establish women on a different life trajectory and Caine has shown how travelling in India gave Pippa Strachey the confidence that empowered her to develop a very different life for herself as an influential feminist organiser on her return home.²⁰⁵

Reading Francesca's accounts of her work in Murcia we can see how she was politicised by what she found there, it inevitably played to the anti-fascist and Republican sympathies with which she went to Spain. Speaking with the refugees of Murcia served to further strengthen her admiration for the Republic and her antipathy towards the old regime and the Spanish Catholic Church:

From my talks with the refugees I began to discover the social background of the Malagans. Most of them had known such bitter poverty in their own homes that their life in the Murcia refuges, unspeakable as it was, was only one degree worse... The conditions of the poor in Andalusia [sic] were, with Estremadura, the worst in Europe - their poverty the most abject. It was the area of the great estates and many of them were landless peasants, unemployed for six months of the year, as there was no winter work, and there was no relief for them, either from church, state or town. When they had work they seldom earned more than 1s. 6d. to 2s a day. Practically all of them were illiterate. For centuries education had been in the hands of the church, who had preferred to keep them ignorant. There were some convent schools for girls where the nuns could not read or write, and could only teach housework. There was some state elementary education under the Monarchy, but it was poor and inadequate. The Republic had promised them better things and had built schools, but was only at the beginning of its programme when the Civil War had broken out. When I heard these things I understood why Malaga was considered a hotbed of revolution, and why they had burnt the churches, which to them were the symbol of oppression.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Eliza Riedi, "Teaching Empire: British and Dominions Women teachers in the South African War Concentration Camps", *English Historical Review*, 120, no. 489 (2005) pp 1316-47

²⁰⁵ See Caine, *Bombay to Bloomsbury*, p 243

²⁰⁶ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 191

This is one of a number of highly critical comments which she makes about the Spanish Catholic Church, which comes under attack for its lack of educational progressivism, for keeping the population in poverty, and for its determination to withstand the modernisation, particularly for women, which she deemed so essential and which she equated with the Republic and its reforms. Like other British activists she saw the conflict in terms of a battle between the 'modern' Republican 'forces of light' on the one hand and Franco and the Catholic Church's 'forces of darkness' on the other.²⁰⁷ There was no doubt in her mind where the light lay, and moreover how England could learn from it:

What startled me in Spain was to see so much that was extremely modern and advanced, side by side with dirt, degradation and mediaeval conditions. It was light struggling with darkness. The Republic had committed a thousand errors, but it was on the side of light. It made me realise once again, as I had in the Pushkin colony in Russia and in Vienna, the life-giving force of their new social order. How false it is to think, as so many do, I reflected, that this system reduces everything to a dull uniformity, manufactures a mass man and extinguishes culture. The contrary is true. The country that adopts it is able to draw on talents that are running to waste. Out of a weed-choked plot it can make a garden. In our slums of London, Liverpool and Glasgow there are riches which we are too lazy and indifferent to tap. "England must be very wealthy to be so wasteful," a Czech refugee once said to me, looking at some meadows in the Cotswolds that were choked with thistles. The trouble is that we are not and that we cannot afford it.²⁰⁸

There is no doubt that she was politicised by what she saw in Spain and she joined the Labour Party during this period.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Buchanan, "A Far Away Country of Which We Know Nothing", pp 7-11

²⁰⁸ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 200

²⁰⁹ Tutor's application form to the University of London's University Extension and Tutorial Classes Council in 1943. I am grateful to Elizabeth June Horder for allowing me to access this document.

Her opinions on the contrast between 'old' and 'new' Spain were not unusual among the Quaker relief workers who went to Spain and who were less sympathetic to the Fascist cause than to the Republicans. As Mendlesohn has demonstrated, despite their desire to maintain a humanitarian and politically neutral stance even those who were not sympathetic to the Republican cause at the outset rapidly became so. Mendlesohn partly ascribed this to the way that Quaker beliefs and traditions made them ideologically suited to working alongside the Republican cause. British Friends tended on the whole to be 'left' leaning with a long-standing tradition of commitment to popular education, welfare reform and social justice.²¹⁰ In addition to Francesca, Mendlesohn highlights Alfred Jacob in particular as displaying strong 'partisan' Republican and anti-Catholic opinions.²¹¹ The same is equally true of the majority of the American Quakers, with the Murcia partnership of Esther Farquhar and Emily Parker also committed to social and educational modernisation and the overthrow of what they deemed to be a repressive Catholic influence.²¹²

Murcia provided Francesca with a space in which she could give reign to her wish for agency and authority, and where as an experienced relief worker she could make a difference to the lives of people who were in dire straits. This desire to be needed and make a difference can be seen elsewhere - in her earlier 'adoption' of Russian children for example, and in her decision in 1939 to continue with her relief work rather than return to the school which 'had disappeared into the silence of evacuation... and did not need me'.²¹³

Throughout her accounts of her work in Murcia, we consistently read a sense

²¹⁰ Ibid., pp 13-14, 20,

²¹¹ Ibid., pp 25-26,

²¹² Ibid., pp 66, 120, 122, 152-3

²¹³ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 236

of excitement in the face of appalling conditions; of the thrill of opportunity and the galvanising potential of new ventures, the 'castles in Spain' to which she referred to in one letter to the FSC, and of a determination to see her plans come to fruition.²¹⁴ This, as we have seen, is borne out by the impressions of her recorded by other relief workers - for the British nurse Dorothy Davies she was 'the moving spirit of many of the enterprises now running'; for Emily Parker she was the one person who 'was not to be deterred' by everyone else's discouragement from establishing her colony at Crevillente; whilst Frida Stewart arrived in Murcia to find a determined and visionary woman who 'had no doubts that her plans could be put into operation'.²¹⁵

In her auto/biographical article on how the cities of New York and Chicago respectively shaped both her own identity and that of her subject Margaret Haley, Rousmaniere powerfully captured how the city 'allows people to recreate themselves', developing an identity which Rousmaniere refers to as the 'City Self'.²¹⁶ In the same way Murcia provided Francesca with a stage on which to recreate herself. Recalling her activities in Murcia she wrote:

Spain in 1937 was the most creative time for me. The most privileged of relief workers are those who are the pioneers, the first on the scene of a disaster. This privilege some inexplicable fate gave me when I arrived alone in Murcia, soon after the wild hordes of refugees from Malaga had arrived there.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, FMW to FSC, 12 Sept 1937; 'Castles in Spain' comes from the title of a novel by John Galsworthy.

²¹⁵ MML, IBA, Box D-2: AC/1, Dorothy Davies, "Six Months in Southern Spain"; MML, IBA, Box D-2: AJ/1, photocopy of part of a letter from Emily Parker, 1938; reminiscences of Frida Stewart quoted in Jackson, *British Women and the Spanish Civil War*, p 119

²¹⁶ Rousmaniere, "Being Margaret Haley, Chicago, 1903", pp 5, 9

²¹⁷ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 108

Murcia allowed Francesca to recreate herself as a creative and autonomous agent, a 'pioneer' who had the authority, experience, skills and confidence to put her own ideas of relief into action.

Despite its prominent place in her life story and the affection with which she recalled her Spanish activism, there is no evidence that Francesca ever returned to Murcia. Given the difficulties that former relief workers had in visiting Spain after the end of the war, and the fact that she only outlived the Franco dictatorship by some six years, this is probably not surprising.²¹⁸ However there is no doubt that the two years she spent travelling backwards and forwards to Southern Spain had a marked affect on the rest of her life. The end of the Civil War also heralded the end of Francesca's life in Birmingham and the end of her career as a schoolteacher. Murcia re-ignited her career as a professional relief worker and acted as a catalyst for re-igniting her writing career. As we will see in the following chapter the years following Murcia were marked by the publication of a number of books and pamphlets which formed the basis of her claim to knowledge and expertise in the area of humanitarian aid and displacement policy and practice in post-war Europe. In the concluding chapter which now follows I turn to my own journey in Francesca's footsteps, and in that respect Holmes' reflection on following in the wake of a biographical subject are as fitting to the closure of this chapter as they are to the closing moments of Francesca's Murcian adventure: 'Sometimes all one achieves is another point of departure'.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ For example see Leah Manning, *A Life for Education* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1970) pp 139-40

²¹⁹ Holmes, *Sidetracks*, p ix

CHAPTER FIVE

A LIFE IN HUMANITARIAN ACTIVISM

A journey like that is like the whole of your Life [sic] in miniature, of course...And constantly you change your companions. As you jog along on your pony or press ahead on foot you find other travellers suddenly by your side conversing with you, urging themselves upon you, telling you their life-story & asking you for yours. And always these companions are changing - they leave you regretfully at the cross-roads & you meet with others, who in their turn greet you & converse & then go their way as you go yours.¹

The twentieth century has been described as a century in which the dominant historical narrative has been one of catastrophe; of wars, dictatorship, famine, displacement and genocide on a mass scale.² In a recent study Winter called for a reconsideration of this 'apocalyptic' narrative to encompass individuals whom he identified as 'minor utopians'; people who in 'moments of possibility' had the vision to 'imagine a radically better world'.³ Francesca was one such woman. She spent a considerable part of her life in international relief work in some of the most traumatic theatres of war, famine, and displacement of the century and was actively engaged in a lifelong attempt to use educational interventions as a transformative force to bring about change on issues of humanitarian relief and displacement.

¹ Vienna diary, 31 Aug 1920

² Jay Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the 20th Century* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006) pp 1, 204-9

³ Ibid., 1-2. Oldfield has also drawn attention to this tendency to focus on the 'evil' and neglect those who strived to alleviate human suffering, see Oldfield, *Women Humanitarians*, p xi

This study has been concerned with the process of researching and telling episodes in this aspect of her life story, episodes which provide a window through which to explore wider and hitherto largely neglected histories - the role of women in international relief in the first half of the twentieth century (in particular Quaker women and women educators and their use of educational interventions in relief work), of the experiences of children of war and displacement and their testimonies through the visual and written word, and of the utilisation of life histories as educational, political and humanitarian tools. It has employed a biographical approach to explore these issues, but it is not a biography as traditionally conceived, a 'life-story, with a beginning and an end in historical time'.⁴ It is rather a series of episodes or portraits, a partial life history, focusing on particular elements of Francesca's story which took place in specific places at specific times in the interwar period. We met Francesca in Vienna in 1919 when she was already 31 years old, largely disregarding her previous activities in Holland, France, Corsica and Serbia during the First World War. We skipped over her period in Russia in 1922-3 and rejoined her on her arrival in Birmingham in 1925 where we struggled to grasp the somewhat fragmentary and shadowy glimpses of her life. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War brought her briefly under a clearer archival spotlight until finally, we bade her farewell at the outbreak of the Second World War, shortly before she departed for Hungary on behalf of the Polish Relief Fund aged 51 and on the verge of embarking on another rich vein of activism in the 1940s and 1950s.⁵ She lived for another 42 years until her death at the age of 93 in

⁴ Carolyn Steedman, "On Not Writing Biography", in *Reading Life Writing, New Formations*, 67 (2009) pp 15-24 p 17

⁵ Francesca's activities in Hungary are recounted in *Margins of Chaos*, whilst her work with UNRRA during the war is described in *Aftermath* and in some of her journalism in the period.

1981. The three episodes explored here are therefore only glimpses from a much longer life and although taking this approach made telling aspects of her long and varied life story a practical proposition within the constraints of an academic thesis, it does of course create its own problems. Can the researcher and the reader understand a life and its meaning from a series of portraits drawn in particular places and moments in time? How does one give the reader an impression of the sheer length, diversity, and geographical spread of Francesca's activism at home and abroad through some of the major events of the twentieth century? Can one analyse change and development or argue for a consistency of motive and activism? Would producing a cradle to grave narrative encompassing all of her life and activities have changed my interpretation of her significance? In this concluding chapter I want to reflect on the process of undertaking this study and on my own journey as a researcher following in Francesca's footsteps, returning to some of the significant methodological issues raised in the preceding chapters and touching upon other issues which came into play whilst researching and telling episodes in her life.

Francesca perceived herself as a citizen of the world and an internationalist. She was a woman who felt at home in places of displacement, disruption and chaos; places that prompted her to political and humanitarian agency on global issues of displacement and enforced exile. In the following section I want to pull together how mapping the shifts in her identities, and the formative role places had in providing her with sites in which she could recreate herself,

enhances our understanding of the life choices that she made on her journey from schoolteacher to international educator activist.

Our interwar encounter with Francesca has been structured around three cities in which she was active, selected by me from a range of possibilities because I felt they represent significant aspects of her development and her activism on an international humanitarian stage. I elected to construct my narrative in such a way partly because reading across Francesca's published and unpublished texts I was struck by the centrality of place in the way in which she herself gave meaning and structure to the narrative of her own life story. Francesca had a strong response to place and scattered throughout her writings are references to her enjoyment of different environments and scenery and the way they affected her life, be that her delight in walking the Northumbrian landscape of her youth and the London squares of her later life, or the sense of freedom and widening horizons that she experienced as a student in Cambridge.⁶ In choosing a geographical structure I also wanted to engage with the recent multidisciplinary 'geographical turn' and my study has therefore been premised on two arguments. Firstly that understanding the geography of a life, the places and spaces in which the story of a life is played out, can contribute to our understanding of that life, and secondly that not only is place a formative characteristic in the construction of a sense of identity, but that 'identity shifts in response to the place' in question.⁷

⁶ See for example Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure* p 88; Wilson, *Portraits and Sketches of Serbia*, p 29

⁷ Hill-Miller, *From the Lighthouse to Monk's House*, p 4

Francesca was born in Newcastle into a very particular cultural and religious context. The family had been members of the Society of Friends for generations and her own awareness of the significance of this genealogical legacy is reflected in the space that she devoted to it in her later autobiography, where a sizeable proportion of the narrative is concerned with her Quaker ancestry.⁸ A number of historians of the women's movement have seen in Quakerism a set of advanced ideas of gender equality that enabled women to circumvent the constraints of gender and exercise an unusual degree of agency in wider political and social roles that provided a platform for the suffrage movement and other feminist causes. Quaker women on the whole were middle class and received a comparatively advanced level of education. They lived within a religious context in which they could exercise a degree of freedom of thought, and which provided a rationale for public activity. Their participation in the highly organised administrative structures of the Society of Friends enabled the development of organisational and administrative experience and skills which made them effective campaigners and activists.⁹ Similarly a tradition of Quaker engagement in campaigns for peace and social justice stretching back to the eighteenth century has been perceived as a platform that enabled women Friends to engage with humanitarian issues on a national and international stage.¹⁰ Although mindful

⁸ See Horder, *Life of Service and Adventure*, chapters 5-7

⁹ Sue Morgan, "Introduction: Women, Religion and Feminism", in Morgan, ed., *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) 1-19, p3; Joyce Goodman & Camilla Leach, "'At the centre of a circle whose circumference spans all nations': Quaker Women and the Ladies Committee of the British and Foreign School Society, 1813-37", in Sue Morgan, ed., *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900*, 53-69 p 53; O'Donnell, "Woman's Rights and Woman's Duties", pp 17-8

¹⁰ Annemieke van Drenth & Francisca de Haan, *The Rise of Caring Power: Elizabeth Fry and Josephine Butler in Britain and the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), chapter two; Storr, *Excluded from the Record*, emphasises the links between women engaging in suffrage campaigns and those undertaking relief work.

of recent work that has to some extent problematised these hypotheses and argued for a more complex and nuanced picture of Quaker gender relations and of their attitudes towards Empire, patriotism, and the peace question, there is no doubt that Francesca's background meant that she was blessed with a significant level of social, cultural and economic capital that enabled her to negotiate the gender limitations of her day and engage in foreign relief work.¹¹ Her Quaker father's recognition of her intellectual ability and his support for her educational aspirations, despite reservations on her mother's part, enabled her to receive an education of a much higher quality than that available to most women, and indeed her brother.¹² Her class, the family's comfortable economic standing, and later her own independent professional teaching salary, augmented by monies earned from journalism and renting out rooms to lodgers, meant that she could afford to take time out of her employment as a teacher. She remained unmarried throughout her life, and although she 'adopted' a number of children and young people for varying degrees of time, her support network of friends and her communal domestic arrangements meant that this did not preclude her travelling abroad. She was brought up in a pacifist and internationalist household, within an extended Quaker family that undertook educational and philanthropic work as a matter of course. She

¹¹ Elizabeth O'Donnell, Thomas Kennedy, and Judy Lloyd have demonstrated that although Quaker women might have been comparatively more equal than women in other religious denominations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in practice they lived under similar constraints of gender inequality to other women of their class and time, see O'Donnell, "Woman's Rights and Woman's Duties"; Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860-1920*, chapter six; Judy P. Lloyd, "The Lloyds of Birmingham: Quaker Culture and Identity 1850-1918" (PhD thesis, University College London, 2006). O'Donnell in particular has challenged the traditional importance ascribed to Quaker women as a group in the development of a feminist consciousness. Similarly Phillips in his thesis argues for a more complex and critical reading of the motivation of international Quaker peace activists in the nineteenth century and of their relationship with ideas of patriotism and British imperialism, see Brian David Phillips, "Friendly Patriotism: British Quakerism and the Imperial Nation 1890-1910" (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1989)

¹² Francesca received a university education where her brother and sisters did not. Maurice followed in his father's footsteps entering the family firm on leaving his Quaker school.

‘rejoined’ the Friends during a period in which British Quakerism underwent a ‘renaissance’, which saw a shift towards increased worldliness, a reassertion of the peace principle, and a reassessment and strengthening of Quaker practical involvement in social issues.¹³ This background undoubtedly played a part in the development of her social and political consciousness and her motivation to intervene directly in humanitarian causes, and many of the women (and men) who were active in international relief in the first half of the twentieth century, including members of her own immediate and extended family, shared very similar social, economic, educational and cultural capital.¹⁴

In her later autobiographical narrative Francesca herself reflected on her motivation for becoming a relief worker and rather self-deprecatingly commented on her fortuity in being born into a generation that did not require formal qualifications for undertaking relief work. In her own words, she ‘slid into relief work without any special qualifications except education, a vaguely Quaker background and importunity’, remarking that when she applied to join the Friends relief teams in 1916 no one asked whether she ‘had a social science diploma’, although interestingly she notes that Ruth Fry was suspicious of her motives.¹⁵ Indeed she turned her down, whereupon Francesca made her own way to Holland and to a cousin who was a relief

¹³ See Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860-1920*, pp 270-84

¹⁴ It should be remembered however that Quaker pacifism in this period was not as all-encompassing as is often thought to be the case. The First World War saw a debate between ‘War Friends’ and those who believed in alternative unarmed service or conscientious objection. Indeed, one third of Quaker men who were eligible for active military service during the First World War did join up and served in the armed forces, see Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860-1920*; Kennedy, “The Quaker Renaissance and the Origins of the Modern British Peace Movement, 1895-1920”, pp 243-272; Lloyd, “The Lloyds of Birmingham”, chapter six, discusses the opposing beliefs of the young Lloyd men during the First World War.

¹⁵ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 105; Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 3

worker there, reflecting the determination and tenacity that would characterise her later activities.¹⁶ Looking back at her life Francesca maintained that a major part of her motivation was a desire for travel and new experiences:

My urge to do relief work was not high-minded...I began without dedication or any desire (except the vaguest) to do good. I wanted foreign travel, adventure, romance, the unknown... The main force driving me...has been first of all a desire for adventure and a new experience and later on a longing for an activity that would take me out of myself, out of the all too bookish world I had lived in.¹⁷

The theme of going out of herself and her bookish world, and of finding a purpose or a 'mission' which would give direction and meaning to life as an unmarried, childless woman, is one to which she returns when writing the lives of other women. We see it for example in her description of Eglantyne Jebb. For Francesca, Jebb was a woman 'tormented by a sense of mission and a feeling of guilt until she had found what her mission was'.¹⁸ Similarly Courtney was a woman who needed a 'cause' to provide a sense of purpose, whilst she describes McFie's quest for a purpose beyond academic research and teaching in terms that evoke a sense of religious vocation.¹⁹ To what degree it is possible to read an autobiographical echo in these comments is of course a matter of speculation. As both Oldfield and Jones have commented, assessing the motives of individual women can be difficult, and indeed many women had multiple motivations, ranging from the altruistic to self-interest.²⁰ However, we should not take her earlier self-deprecating comment at face value. Oldfield has drawn attention to the tendency among many of her humanitarian subjects

¹⁶ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 3-8

¹⁷ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, pp 105, 109

¹⁸ Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, p 9

¹⁹ Women's Library, KDC/K12/13, pp 1, 31, 23-4; CUFOSL, IH A/33, p 1

²⁰ Jones, *Women in British Public Life*, p 108-9; Oldfield, *Women Humanitarians*, p xii

to downplay their activities, to represent their humanitarian work as being nothing out of the ordinary, and their achievements as small compared to those of others.²¹ Francesca herself in both *Margins of Chaos* and *Life of Service and Adventure* displayed this attitude, maintaining that she was never in the front lines but only 'in the margins' and 'on the fringes' of war and danger, and commenting that when she compared her own activities with the selflessness of others, such as her friend Dot Newhall who nursed typhus victims in Serbia in 1915, she was 'awed into silence'.²² She locates this modesty firmly in the tradition of Quaker relief culture, arguing that the difference between the Friends and other agencies was that they worked anonymously and did 'not seek personal glory from their service'.²³ It is a modesty and approval of anonymity that can be perceived as existing in conflict with her consistent endeavours to write herself and her relief colleagues into history.

Jones has argued that as most of the documents written by the women at the time were for public consumption they are of limited assistance for analysing their motives.²⁴ This is certainly true of Francesca's letters and reports to the FSC which exhibit a consciousness that they will be used as a basis for articles, circulars and reports to meetings. Jones further suggests that more useful insight is to be gained from looking at the issues and groups that women relief workers prioritised in the 1920s and 1930s, and highlights three groups in particular with which they were active - the middle class, other women, and

²¹ Oldfield, *Women Humanitarians*, p xii; for similar comments on women being unwilling to celebrate achievement see Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (London: The Women's Press, 1989) p 24; Martin & Goodman, *Women and Education, 1800-1980*, pp 17-8

²² Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p viii; Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 111

²³ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 111

²⁴ Jones, *Women in British Public Life*, pp 108-9

children.²⁵ This prompts readings in which their motives are based on transnational class-based sympathy, feminism or at least a sense of prioritising 'women's issues', and a concern for the welfare of children. The latter in particular could lead to a temptation to view their work and motivation through a prism of maternalism or 'social motherhood' as defined by Koven and Michel in relation to women's philanthropic work and the establishment of the British welfare state.²⁶ Francesca worked with all three groups; in Vienna she was part of the Quaker assistance to the city's middle class and her writings from this period certainly demonstrate a sympathy with middle class women and their privations in particular. Can she be defined as a feminist? She certainly considered herself a feminist in later life, although nowhere during the period under study here does she define herself as such.²⁷ Throughout her career she provided relief to women and wrote articles which addressed women's issues, although it is difficult to assess whether this was primarily because she aimed her articles at the dedicated women's sections of newspapers. Some of her comments on the position of women abroad and at home, her networks, and the organisations in which she participated infer a degree of feminism. In contrast her rather lukewarm description of her suffrage activities, and the fact that she does not write or campaign actively on women's issues or confine herself exclusively to the welfare of women would place her outside a narrow

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Seth Koven & Sonya Michel, eds., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (London: Routledge, 1993); see also Jane Lewis, *Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 1991); Jane Lewis, "Gender, the family and women's agency in the building of 'welfare states': the British Case", *Social History*, 19, no. 1 (1994) pp 37-55

²⁷ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, part II, recollections of Tony & E. Gilpin p 27. There has been considerable discussion in feminist historiography of the application and definition of the term feminist to past activism, see for example Philippa Levine, *Feminist Lives in Victorian England: Private Roles and Public Commitment* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1990) particularly pp 1-11; Barbara Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) particularly pp 1-10

definition. Her concern was broader, and in that she is comparable to the activists of the 1930s identified by Alberti who turned from exclusively female concerns to a broader humanitarian concern with Fascism.²⁸ If one uses broader definitions of feminism such as those adopted in recent studies of women and education then one could certainly include her as a woman who improved the condition of other women and who challenged the perceived boundaries of femininity in exercising agency.²⁹

Although Francesca demonstrates a lifelong concern for displaced and refugee children, and a deep interest in children's education and creativity, she does not position herself within a maternalist discourse or use arguments relating to women's maternal nature to legitimise her actions. Her relief work was not exclusively with women and children, her work with wounded Serb men and her concern for displaced adult men in Spain, Germany and elsewhere are indicative of a sense of a wider humanitarian moral obligation to intervene. In that sense she is more readily located within the humanitarian culture of 'caring power' identified by Van Drenth.³⁰ Although she ascribes her motivation to adopt Russian children to very personal reasons, an unfulfilled wish to marry and have children, the archive shows that it was part of a broader concern and

²⁸ Johanna Alberti, "British feminists and anti-fascism in the 1930s", in Sybil Oldfield, ed., *This Working-day World: Women's Lives and Culture(s) in Britain 1914-1945* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994) 111-22, p 118

²⁹ Joyce Goodman & Sylvia Harrop, "'Within marked boundaries': women and the making of educational policy since 1800", in Goodman & Harrop, eds., *Women, Educational Policy-Making and Administration in England: Authoritative Women since 1880* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000) 1-13, pp 3-4; Sue Morgan, *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900*, pp 3-4; Sarah Jane Aiston, "Women, Education and Agency, 1600-2000: A Historical Perspective", in Jean Spence, Aiston & Maureen M. Meikle, eds., *Women, Education and Agency, 1600-2000* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2010) 1-8, p 5

³⁰ van Drenth & de Haan, *The Rise of Caring Power*. Van Drenth and de Haan identify the development of 'a new humanitarian sensibility' after 1750 based on a commitment to the well-being of others which originally grew out of a religiously inspired notion of pastoral power and practical Christianity, and which they identify as being particularly relevant to Quakers and Protestant evangelical groups.

linked to an attempt to involve the Warwickshire North Quaker Monthly Meeting in an organised fostering scheme for children exiled in Paris.³¹

In engaging in foreign relief work Francesca not only went out of herself and outside the traditional scope of middle class female activism but quite literally 'out of place', and this had significant consequences in terms of the lack of historical attention paid to Francesca's story and those of her humanitarian colleagues. Most of her activism took place abroad on an international rather than a local or national stage, and was largely concerned with the welfare of men, women and children of whom little was known in Britain, or who were, or had recently been, 'the enemy'. As Lawn and Goodman have demonstrated educators participating on an international stage often travelled beyond the boundaries of the domestic national or local narratives of the history of education.³²

Like a number of women of her class and education, going out of place through travel and engaging with different cultures stimulated her intellectually and contributed to the development of her knowledge, experience and philosophy of relief. Places of displacement and crises for others were transformative places for Francesca herself; they were creative places, places of self-

³¹ Bull Street Meeting House, WNMM minute book 31, 3 April 1928 records that she had reported on the conditions of Russian exiles living in Paris and suggested bringing some of the young people to England 'where in Christian homes' they would be able to obtain a knowledge of the language that would assist them in the future.

³² Martin Lawn, 'Reflecting the Passion: Mid-century Projects for Education', *History of Education*, 33, no. 3 (2004) pp 505-513; Martin Lawn, 'Circulations and Exchanges: Emergence of Scientific Cosmopolitanism in Educational Research' (paper presented at the Congress of Historical Sciences, Sydney, 2005); Joyce Goodman, 'Working for Change Across International Borders: the Association of Headmistresses and Education for International Citizenship' *Paedagogica Historica*, 43, no. 1 (2007) pp 165-80; Joyce Goodman, 'Social Change and Secondary Schooling for Girls in the "Long 1920s": European Engagements' *History of Education*, 36, nos. 4-5 (2007) pp 497-513

discovery, and places of connection - to networks, peoples and ideas which influenced her subsequent life and activism. Francesca clearly felt that she had benefited greatly from experiencing new places and different cultures. It was being in Vienna which laid many of the foundations of her future interests and campaigning techniques. It also contributed to developing her networks. Despite her mother's conversion, as a woman born into a Quaker family she already had access to well-developed kinship networks, which were further enhanced by her time at Newnham, her relief work during the First World War with the Friends, and subsequently the three years she spent in the Vienna Quaker Mission. Vienna marked the beginning of her longstanding connection with the nascent SCF and the Buxton/Jebb family. It was where she first met Kathleen Courtney, Hilda Clark, Edith Pye, and Maud Royden - four women whom she later credited with laying the foundations of many of her own beliefs about relief in practice, and who gave her 'the greatest experience in administration and organisation and practice in publicity' in her life.³³ It marked the beginning of a longstanding respect for her American colleagues, some of whom like Dorothy North would become life-long friends, and a belief in the need for an organised and scientific approach to relief work which is articulated in her later writings on relief policy and practice. It led to her involvement in Macedonia on behalf of the WILPF in 1929, and her earlier attendance at an international congress discussing children and war in Geneva in 1920, alongside other women such as Dorothy Buxton, Edith Pye, Edith Paget, Catherine Booth, Ethel Snowden and Connie Hawker and her husband Bertram. A number of these individuals subsequently worked with her on the

³³ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 108

committee of the CAEF. The CAEF in turn brought her into contact with a wider circle of educationalists, artists and activists such as Sir Michael Sadler, Edmund Holmes, Charlotte Mason, Albert Mansbridge, George Clausen and W.R. Lethaby. Vienna broadened her artistic and intellectual horizons and it was where she began writing and publishing in earnest, both to raise awareness of the need and the difference humanitarian aid could make, and to disseminate Cizek's pedagogical theories to a wider world. It was where she experimented with the power of the visual as a highly effective political and fundraising tool, and where she came into contact with political ideas and movements which would have a profound influence on her life, the socialism of 'Red Vienna', anti-Semitism, and the seeds of the Fascism which would occupy her mind in the 1930s and 1940s.

Her experiences in Murcia also had a profound affect on her life and it is clear that it was a place where she felt a close affinity with the people and very much at home. Reading her Murcia narratives one is immediately struck by the energy that runs through them, the sense of excitement, autonomy, and creativity, of her belief that she could and would make a difference, of her joy at working collaboratively with like minded people who believed that the forces of 'light' would overcome the forces of 'darkness'.³⁴ Murcia and her re-entry into practical relief work set the tone for her activities during the Second World War and beyond. It re-affirmed her belief in the need for education, training and useful occupation for the displaced. Her experiences of progressive education and the evacuation and housing of displaced children in 'progressive' colonies

³⁴ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 200

informed her thinking on how humanitarian aid for the young should be organised in the following decade. It cemented many of her beliefs about the need for a democratic approach to relief, and established principles which underpin her activities and her writings on post-war reconstruction and the displaced in the 1940s and 1950s. In Murcia, as in Vienna and Russia, she was again part of a transatlantic Quaker relief network, which was broadened to encompass other humanitarian activists driven by political rather than religious motivation. She became part of a wider humanitarian and political network of circulation and exchange, in which the visual and textual representations of those affected by the war, particularly children, were used to raise awareness and funds in ways that many campaigning organisations continue to use today.

Taking these two cities as case studies enabled me to engage with issues that are reflected in her activism elsewhere and a number of the characteristics that are apparent in her accounts of Vienna and Murcia also appear in relation to places beyond the boundaries of this study. Her interest in people and in using their stories to illuminate wider issues can be seen in her first published book in 1920, *Portraits and Sketches of Serbia*, a book borne out of her relief work during the First World War and motivated by a desire to counter what she perceived to be a flagging of interest in Serbia and its sacrifice since the Armistice. Although she had studied history at Newnham, it was being in Serbia and her interaction with Serbian people that gave her an understanding of the power of history, and of the effects that war and displacement had in moulding individual and collective identities; of the importance of the sense of

belonging to a particular place and the consequences of exile for the displaced. Again, life histories were crucial to this understanding. Later in life she reflected:

This gave me something unique: the learning of the history of...an entirely unknown people, not from books but from the mouths of those who were living in it, and to whom the past was an experience almost as real as their own.³⁵

Her response was to attempt to understand that sense of belonging and loss through engaging with people she met on her travels. She set great store by learning the language fluently enough to be able to converse wherever she went - to develop effective understanding and empathy you had to learn the language, talk to the people, and immerse yourself in their culture. As a talented linguist already familiar with Latin, Greek, French and German, she learnt Serbian, Russian and Spanish during the course of her relief work. Explaining her inability to write about the Muslim cultures she encountered when working with displaced Serbs in North Africa she stressed the importance that learning the language had for developing empathy and understanding:

I was too much involved in learning to understand the Serbs - their language, their poetry, their history, themselves - to pay much attention to our Arab background: besides I always feel ashamed at regarding human beings and human cultures as mere decoration and I had no time to study Arabic.³⁶

As in Murcia, her response to Serbia, and to the Muslim culture she found there, displayed her romantic and somewhat 'orientalist' views on 'peasants'

³⁵ Horder, Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure, p 106

³⁶ "Oriental Serbia", Bryn Mawr College Library, Dorothy North Haskins Papers, Series 1, Box 2, folder 9

and folk culture. Francesca's tendency to romanticise the 'foreign' is most obvious in her writings about the Serbs in *Margins of Chaos* and *Portraits and Sketches of Serbia*. Her descriptions of the beauty of Serbian 'peasant' clothes, customs, and way of life in the latter abound with a tension between the attraction of this pure and unsullied way of life, which she compared favourably with an England scarred by urbanisation and industrialisation, and a very patronising view of their childlike 'simplicity':

Serbs, like all mediaeval people, are craftsmen born. They are children still, and like children they love to create. They have scarcely any machines in their country and few modern improvements, so they have never had the joy and pride of making things crushed out of them as we have in the West. Their designs, when they are left to themselves, are unselfconscious, irresistible, gay, naïve, yet wonderfully sure.³⁷

She seemed oblivious to this tension and was very surprised when a Cambridge educated Serb challenged her interpretation:

He was a handsome young man with a clear skin and dreamy brown eyes. He told me that I did not understand his people - on the one hand I was romantic about them, and on the other spoke of them in a condescending and superior way. I was much intrigued by this bold criticism on the part of a stranger, and we had a long talk.³⁸

This tendency to patronise and essentialise national characteristics, so common to her class and time, resurfaced in both Vienna and Spain.³⁹

³⁷ Wilson, *Portraits and Sketches of Serbia*, p 34

³⁸ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 99; his name was Popović and he was working with the Serbian Relief Fund, Vienna diary, 31 July 1920

³⁹ It can also be seen in later texts such as *Aftermath* where certain comments on some of the Jewish survivors with whom she worked in particular demonstrate a tension between sympathy for the Jews and stereotypical and anti-Semitic comments characteristic of the period even among those activists who were sympathetic to the plight of Jewish refugees and Holocaust survivors; on p 140, for example, she explained how the 'besetting sins of the Jews' are 'understandable when one remembers their persecution'. For more on similar attitudes to Jewish refugees see Tony Kushner & Katherine Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century* (London: Frank Cass,

Central to the attraction of travelling and activism abroad was her interest in people and their daily life experiences. Travel provided the opportunity to meet and converse with other travellers, and engage in the exchange of life stories described in the opening quotation of this chapter. Her published and unpublished texts abound with references to, and quotations from, conversations with strangers. More often than not these are people who, like her, were in transit either through forced displacement or simply because they happened to be travelling on the same train or boat. Her love of travel and of getting to know peoples and cultures continued throughout her life and in the 1950s and 1960s she wrote travel pieces for newspapers and published anthologies of historical travel writings by others.⁴⁰ Similarly her affinity with the transient continued in her British life as a boarding house landlady and host of refugees and émigrés, in both Birmingham during the interwar period and in London after the Second World War. She was genuinely interested in these fellow travellers and what is significant for the purposes of this study is her recognition of the educational and political usefulness of life stories; her awareness that by using vignettes to personalise her accounts she could touch a chord in her audience.⁴¹ She realised that her own autobiography and the biographies of others provided a window onto some of the key humanitarian issues of the first half of the twentieth century. Her texts displayed an awareness of the transformative political and educational potential of her auto/biographical account, of the relationship between her own autobiography as activist-author, the life experiences of her subjects, and the response that

1999) chapter 5; Tony Kushner, *Remembering refugees: Then and now* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2006) chapter 3 in particular.

⁴⁰ See for example Wilson, *Strange Island*, and *Muscovy: Russia through Foreign Eyes*

⁴¹ Women's Library, KDC/K12/13, 30-1. Vandiver, quoted in Kridel *Writing Educational Biography*, p 3

she was consciously teasing from her reader. Her claim to authority as a commentator on international issues of relief and displacement was based squarely on her own personal interactions and experiences, and she used the telling of that experience as an educational intervention to foster individual and group agency on behalf of the displaced.

In contrast to her accounts of her travels abroad the analysis of Birmingham as a significant place in her life is of a somewhat different nature. In contrast to Vienna and Murcia the city is largely absent from her autobiographical accounts. Birmingham was a place from which she travelled to other places, a place from which she wrote descriptions of other places. One senses that she considered her life in the city to be too 'ordinary' to feature in her accounts and that it is in the context of the 'extra-ordinary' - the adoption of Russian children, the engagements with émigrés and refugees, the Aid Spain movement - that it appeared, and then only as a backdrop. There are no evocative musings on the city's topography, architecture, history and people as we see elsewhere. For these reasons early on in my research I had originally considered it to be a 'non-place' in Francesca's life, or in her words 'a place that had got lost'.⁴² However, I came to realise that this was to underestimate its significance in the development of her personal relationships, her networks, the honing of her journalism and its deployment in anti-Fascist causes, and her growing politicisation, all of which played a major part in her subsequent life and activism.

⁴² She used this phrase to describe a place in Croatia in Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 88

Francesca's experiences in Vienna, Birmingham and Murcia contributed to her education as an international humanitarian activist and commentator, and were crucial in the trajectory of her subsequent life and the meaning she ascribed to it. She did not return to school teaching after her Murcian adventure but continued with relief work in Central Europe in the first year of the war before returning to Britain where she worked in evacuation and refugee hostels, established a 'farm colony' for refugee boys and girls at Lynwode Manor in Market Rasen, Lincolnshire, and assisted refugee organisations in London, before joining UNRRA and subsequently the International Refugee Organisation.⁴³ During and after the Second World War the campaigning journalism that began in Vienna and evolved in Birmingham and Murcia continued, and her articulation of the experiences she accumulated provided the basis for her claim to knowledge as an authoritative commentator on issues of relief and displacement during and after the war and we see a gradual shift towards pieces that are increasingly conscious attempts to engage in policy discourse. In her Second World War journalism she wrote, for example, about the lessons Britain should learn from France and Republican Spain when planning the evacuation of children, the plight of Polish refugees in Hungary and Rumania, the need for state nurseries for the children of women war workers, her work with Jewish survivors of concentration camps, and her visit to Dachau. She continued to write in the press about the issues facing the displaced well into the 1950s.⁴⁴

⁴³ She co-owned Lynwode Manor with a friend, it is now a care home and treatment centre for substance abuse.

⁴⁴ Francesca M. Wilson, "Visit to Dachau", *The Manchester Guardian*, 2 August 1945, p 4; Francesca M. Wilson, "Hope and heartbreak. What is to Happen to the 'Left-Over' Refugees?", *The Friend*, 14 October 1949, pp 825-7; Francesca M. Wilson, "A Hungarian Camp", *The Manchester Guardian*, 3 April 1957, p 5

However, it is in her published books and pamphlets that we see the most significant contribution to the discourse surrounding relief policy and practice. During the Second World War she published *Margins of Chaos*, which appeared in 1944. Although written after or towards the end of the period which is the focus of this study it provides one of the most significant printed sources for her interwar activism and the meaning she ascribed to it and in that context it merits further attention here. The account begins early in the First World War with Francesca's first encounter with Belgian refugees on the docks at Tilbury in October 1914 and closes with her return to England from Hungary in May 1940, and therefore covers a crucial period in her development into the activist and commentator she became by the 1940s and 50s.⁴⁵ In publishing *Margins of Chaos* she aimed to do more than simply relate her own autobiographical experiences, and the book reads as a manifesto for her brand of relief work. She articulated her motivation in her introduction to the volume, in a comment that could easily be a justification for the re-telling of her story today. After describing her feelings on finding and reading the contents of a box-full of her letters and diaries from the First World War preserved by her sisters, she went on to comment:

I was struck by the contrasts with the present day, but still more by the resemblances. The conditions we shall find in Europe when this war is over will be similar to those described in many chapters of this book. Hordes of disabled men, displaced populations struggling to get home, prisoners dying of typhus and starvation, hunger diseases in cities, famine and epidemic in country areas - all these situations will have to be faced again, on a much vaster scale, at the outbreak of peace, as they were last

⁴⁵ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 1. Francesca was part of a team sent by the Friends and Polish Relief Fund to Hungary and Rumania in autumn 1939, her fellow workers being Dermot O'Donovan and Dr. Richard Ellis, both of whom had collaborated with her in Spain. She had to leave Hungary in May 1940 following her involvement with the refugee underground movement and her arrest by the Hungarian secret police, see Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 236-268

time...Indeed my excuse for writing this book when paper is so short, is that something may be learnt from the relief work of the past, by its mistakes, which I do not attempt to conceal, as well as by its achievements.⁴⁶

Reflecting on her experiences at the end of the volume she countered the sense of paralysis or cynicism that she feared might overwhelm an observer realistically contemplating the scale of the task involved, less than 30 years after similar efforts had been expended on the continent. Her comments could also be read as an autobiographical reflection on the effectiveness of her own humanitarian interventions in the same period:

Thinking over relief work in the middle of a new chaos, with the old situations back again, magnified and multiplied and a thousand times more hideous, is not an encouraging task. What does it appear in retrospect but lost endeavour: an ever-repeated sweeping up the sands with vaster deserts in front? A voice says "Try to discover and uproot the causes of war, of famine and of poverty, and your energies will be better employed." The need for relief argues a diseased society. But now we are asking our doctors to prevent disease rather than patch it up.

Yet, though it is salutary to consider wider issues and to regard with criticism and disillusion rather than with complacency the efforts of the past, our post-war problems are on the doorstep and cannot be pushed aside. Thousands of young men and women of adventurous spirit and - most of them - of great goodwill are all on fire to tackle them. Are they to be told that they will only be sand-sweepers and had better stay at home? Has foreign relief then nothing to its credit?⁴⁷

As well as an exercise in public education on the need for a humanitarian response to conditions in Europe, the text also represents a conscious attempt to influence post-war relief and reconstruction practice and contribute to the discourse surrounding government policy on the displaced.⁴⁸ As part of this

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp vii-viii

⁴⁷ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 267-8

⁴⁸ During the period since I began my research, Francesca's activities in the Second World War and her attempt to influence post-war planning has begun to receive some attention see David Stafford, *Endgame 1945: Victory, Retribution, Liberation* (London: Little, Brown, 2007);

process she provided an appendix to the book which was designed as both a guide to practice and a summary of her own underlying theories on relief which draws heavily on her experiences in Vienna and Murcia. The appendix was later re-published in an extended format as a pamphlet by John Murray and the Friends Relief Service.⁴⁹ She briefly considered the history of humanitarian aid, arguing that mass international relief prompted by a 'humanitarian, non-proselytising impulse' was a modern phenomenon which began with the First World War, before going on to advocate an approach based on two key principles that appear repeatedly in both texts. First, she made the case for humanitarian relief that was well coordinated by official agencies and based on a body of knowledge and survey work undertaken using the most modern advances in social and medical sciences, working where possible in close collaboration with existing local authorities. Secondly, she argued that relief policy and practice should be based on democratic principles where both the relief worker and more importantly the recipient of relief is consulted and encouraged to actively participate in the decision making process. The latter was fundamentally important if the recipient was to maintain a sense of self-respect and escape a fate where they 'degenerate rapidly into helpless paupers'.⁵⁰ The recipients should elect representatives to sit on Relief Committees, thereby ensuring that:

Ben Shephard, "'Becoming Planning Minded': The Theory and Practice of Relief 1940-1945", in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, no. 3, 405-419; G. Daniel Cohen, "Between Relief and Politics: Refugee Humanitarianism in Occupied Germany 1945-1946", in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, no. 3, 437-49

⁴⁹ Francesca M. Wilson, *Advice to Relief Workers Based on Personal Experiences in the Field* (London: John Murray & Friends Relief Service, 1945)

⁵⁰ Wilson, *Advice to Relief Workers*, p 6

The relief worker is there to provide the means by which the people help themselves. He [sic] must stand aside watching them do it, accepting their advice in his many dilemmas, for Continental peoples are more resourceful than the average over-civilised American or Britisher.⁵¹

She traced the genealogy of these views on democracy and participation to the fundamental tenets of the Quaker approach to relief practice, again reflecting the influence that her Quaker background had on her beliefs and values.

Humanitarian aid should be about long term 'rehabilitation' through agriculture, industry and education as well as short-term emergency relief. By using the knowledge and resourcefulness of the people themselves, coupled with scientifically researched surveys of need and local context, aid agencies could avoid the wasteful examples of inappropriate aid which she cited from her own early experiences in Serbia and elsewhere. Research, planning and co-ordination by official agencies was the key to avoiding the duplication and misallocation of scarce resources which occurred among the 'dozens' of unco-ordinated and disparate voluntary organisations after the First World War, which in her opinion resulted in an 'undignified scramble for the disabled and the shell-shocked'.⁵² Although accepting that there would always be a need for voluntary organisations, and that when well planned and co-ordinated they made a valuable contribution, she was scathing of their often undemocratic, unprofessional, and patronising attitudes:

The Lady Bountiful attitude is not, however, dead; I have found it in many relief workers. It is a hangover from the Victorian age when the rich needed the poor; by their gifts to them they could gain a high place in the world to come and added prestige down here; but they expected gratitude all the same. Refugees are often accused of not being grateful. Why should they be? Their misfortune is none of their seeking. I found less of

⁵¹ Ibid., p 7

⁵² Wilson, *Advice to Relief Workers*, p 4

this Lady Bountiful approach among Americans than among the British, not only because there is less class distinction in the U.S.A., but because social work has been a profession with them longer than with us and they have a sensible, workmanlike attitude towards poverty and distress, as to something temporary like sickness, not permanent, ordained by God and largely due to the poor's own fault.⁵³

The other interesting insight gained from both texts is her views on women's role in international aid. Whilst maintaining that women had played a significant and officially under-recognised role in international relief throughout the first half of the twentieth century, she went on to articulate essentialist and stereotypical gendered views of the period, that women are by nature better suited to relief work than men and on the whole are capable of achieving more because they are more adaptable and better at dealing with interruptions and the 'make-do-and-mends and improvisations which emergency work involves but which exasperates a capable man'.⁵⁴ However, women have their drawbacks:

...women are more quickly intoxicated by power than men. The unaccustomed authority which the control of goods in short supply gives them, often turns their heads. I have seen women who have begun well, turn over-night into dictators. In a trice they are surrounded by sycophants. They appear in the Press as Mothers of Starving Millions. Their tours become royal processions. No flattery is too gross for them. Soon they start steam-rolling out of action their rivals in good works. First they take away their reputation and then - their funds. Their colleagues can no longer work with them, unless they become courtiers and stooges. Obscure women in their own home towns, they exact obedience from their subjects, once they are Queens of Distressed Ruritarians. The danger is great. Anonymity should be the ideal of the relief worker - her reward not only a good task performed, but all the experiences and adventures she has in its performance.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid., pp 7-8

⁵⁴ Ibid., p 9

⁵⁵ Wilson, *Advice to Relief Workers*, p 9

Whether this stinging attack was motivated by a particular individual or personal experience is not known, and on the whole she is complimentary when writing of her relief colleagues.

Particular attention is paid in the texts to the psychological consequences of war, a theme with which she first engaged in Vienna, and she singled out two groups as being of particular psychological interest. Firstly the displaced, who in addition to dealing with the ravages of war faced by the distressed civilian population also face 'the greater mental anguish that comes not merely with homelessness but with being far from one's home, often in a foreign country'.⁵⁶ Her answer was two fold: in the field the displaced should be assisted to maintain their self-respect by participating in decision making whilst at the same time engaging in gainful occupation, educational provision and cultural stimulus. In wider policy terms, their stateless status needed to be countered by an international charter guarantying their human rights. Secondly, she briefly discussed the need to address psychological damage to children. Citing her experiences in Spain she advocated the establishment of colonies for orphans, with day colonies for those who had parents, as she believed they were less psychologically damaging than separation and offered a cost effective solution. For those children who suffered profound damage through sexual abuse, prostitution, or delayed puberty due to undernourishment or anxiety, 'special homes' were required to ensure their 'rehabilitation'.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p 9

In the Margins of Chaos and *Advice to Relief Workers* were not her only foray into the discourse of relief policy and practice and in 1947 the Bureau of Current Affairs published her *Displaced Persons - Whose Responsibility?*⁵⁷ It adopted a more factual approach with definitions and figures for various categories of displaced persons. The pamphlet was introduced and structured as an aid to facilitate discussion in a group or educational setting raising such questions as who should be responsible for maintaining displaced persons and should they be forcibly repatriated? Is Britain doing enough? Does Britain need more foreign labour? How would a more liberal immigration policy affect 'British workers'? Although she referred to many of the same issues such as the need for education, work and entertainment for displaced persons who remained in the camps of Europe, in this pamphlet she expressed some of the sentiments which we see later in *They Came as Strangers* on the benefits to Britain of accepting refugees and the need to amend the over restrictive aliens' legislation.

The same year saw the publication of *Aftermath*, which in some ways can be viewed as a sequel to *Margins of Chaos*. We see a return to the autobiographical genre and the use of her own experiences in 1945-46 as the basis for disseminating her message, and to the authorial device of personalising the life stories of individuals as a means of provoking empathy and reminding readers that the nameless mass was made up of individual people, each of whom had a story to tell. The book was promoted as 'the first inside account' of UNRRA's work and made much of the 'authenticity' lent to

⁵⁷ Francesca M. Wilson, *Displaced Persons - Whose Responsibility?* (London: Bureau of Current Affairs, 1947)

the text by Francesca's experience.⁵⁸ Her concern for the displaced was also the motivation for the publication of *They Came as Strangers: The Story of Refugees to Great Britain* where we see the most self-conscious articulation of her educational and political objectives, as well as her interest in history. Dedicated to 'all the Exiles who have enlivened my Home' it was published as part of 'World Refugee Year' (June 1959-May 1960). Her aim was to increase popular understanding of current issues by placing them in their historical context, and to counter prejudice by giving the 'general reader...some impression of the kind of people who came here, why they were fleeing, how they were received both by the man in the street, the upper classes and the authorities; how they lived here, what they contributed to the country and what they got out of it'.⁵⁹ It traced the history of refugees arriving in Britain from the fourteenth century Flemings, through the Second World War, to the refugees arriving in the 1950s. Again she attempted to give voice to refugees themselves by using individual life stories and extensive use of quotations from memoirs and autobiographical accounts where they existed, a device which as we have seen runs consistently through her work. Her motivation to use history as an educational and campaigning tool was summed up in the preface:

Yet the refugees who have succeeded in penetrating our island fortress have had an importance out of all proportion to their numbers and if we cast up our balance sheet we will find that we have gained far more than we have given.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Wilson, *Aftermath*, inside cover, publisher's promotional text

⁵⁹ Wilson, *They Came as Strangers*, p xiii, part of the book's royalties went to the cause. There is evidence in the Mass Observation archive that people were increasingly antagonistic to the numbers of refugees arriving in the UK during the Second World War, quoted in Myers, "Englishness, Identity and Refugee Children in Britain, 1937-1945", pp 272-3

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p xix

The book closed with an appendix on refugee year in which she expressed the hope that governments, not least the British Government, would be encouraged to introduce legislation 'permitting a more favourable intake of refugees', thereby rendering the remaining displaced persons camps of Europe unnecessary. She also advocated 'a less impersonal way' of achieving this end; individual British citizens should each 'adopt' a refugee, and towns or communities should prepare 'to "adopt" a whole camp and be responsible for its clearance', an approach which she had earlier attempted in Birmingham in the late 1920s when advocating the adoption of individual émigré Russian children by the Warwickshire Friends.⁶¹

But did all these efforts in writing and publicity make a difference to public opinion? Assessing the reception of her journalist pieces is almost impossible but for her published books there is some evidence of the reactions they inspired. There is evidence to indicate that *Margins of Chaos*, for example, was very well received. It had the benefit of an extremely complimentary foreword by the historian and *Manchester Guardian* journalist J.L. Hammond who praised Francesca for her resourcefulness, humanity and lack of condescension towards her subjects, concluding that:

She is drawn to such enterprises not so much by a sense of duty inspired by this or that view of life, as by a universal interest in human character. There is no trace of patronage or condescension in her attitude to the victims of war or famine because she does not think of them as raw material for the organising skills of philanthropists but as men and women into whose lives and interests she likes to enter. Her relation to them is that of human friendship...It is this that makes her book so interesting to the general reader, and so valuable to the politician...Miss Wilson's book

⁶¹ Ibid., p 248

will be of the greatest value in guiding those workers and the authorities that direct and organise their efforts.⁶²

The book received favourable reviews in specialist journals and in the press. In the journal of the Royal Institute for International Affairs Hilda Clark, although hardly a dispassionate reviewer perhaps, praised it as 'invaluable' for those working in voluntary organisations and those working in the planning of 'Government relief', stating that Francesca's 'shrewd judgement is based on an unbiased, compassionate interest in the individual and a flair for what is important in the relations of the individual to the community'.⁶³ In *The American Economic Review* Hertha Kraus, a refugee herself and lecturer in social work at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, provided another complimentary review, stating that:

Francesca Wilson's simple and vivid account of her many colorful [sic] activities and experiences is completely unassuming and unembellished; plain statements of an eye-witness with a warm heart and pretty sharp eyes who above all likes people and wants to share her strength but who has few illusions as to the adequacy of the services of which she has been a vital part.⁶⁴

Whilst in *The Manchester Guardian*, 'M.A.L.' began by drawing attention to tensions inherent in international relief work, a 'difficult, and sometimes destructive...form of benevolence', before praising Francesca's attitude, common sense, and humanity:

⁶² J.L. Hammond, 'Foreword' to Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp iii-iv. Her following publication *Aftermath* is dedicated to J.L. and Barbara Hammond. Lawrence Hammond was an internationalist and lifelong friend of Gilbert Murray, he had covered the Paris peace conference and treaty of Versailles for the Manchester Guardian and returned to its staff at the outbreak of the Second World War, see Stewart A. Weaver, 'Hammond, (John) Lawrence Le Breton (1872-1949)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33673> [Accessed 21 August 2006]

⁶³ Hilda Clark, in *International Affairs*, 20, no. 4 (1944) p 575

⁶⁴ Hertha Kraus, *The American Economic Review*, 36, no. 1 (March 1946) pp 190-1

She has learned the language of each country in which she served, and her aim has always been to show people how to help themselves rather than to bolster them up with props that can only be temporary...The hungry and homeless are never “cases” to Miss Wilson, but people with names, personalities, and histories...It is also curiously impersonal. In a famine or war-shattered area the hardships of the relief worker are not much less than those of the refugees, but Miss Wilson makes no mention of them.⁶⁵

Margins of Chaos was evidently popular with the public as well; it was a Book Society ‘choice’ and by May 1946 had run into three printings in Britain and been published in the USA by Macmillan.⁶⁶ A measure of the public response can also be seen in the many letters she received requesting her services as a speaker.⁶⁷ Her publications had undoubtedly established her as a respected authority on displacement, humanitarian relief and European reconstruction and she was in demand, touring the UK addressing public meetings. This provided her with a further opportunity for disseminating her message and continued her practice of addressing public meetings that we saw to some degree in the early 1920s, when she addressed meetings on her experiences in Vienna, but which really came to the fore during the Spanish Civil War.

⁶⁵ *The Manchester Guardian*, 26 May 1944, p 3. M.A.L. might be Madeline Linford.

⁶⁶ Wilson, *Advice to Relief Workers*, publisher’s frontispiece; letter FMW to Harold Shearman of the University of London, 17 May 1946. I am grateful to Elizabeth June Horder for allowing me to access this file of correspondence.

⁶⁷ A file of over 100 letters survives among papers preserved by her niece covering the period 1943-52, the vast majority dating from 1944-8, discussing lectures to a broad range of organisations many of them educational or women’s organisations. They include several from headmistresses and teachers at girls’ High Schools, branches of SCF, Women’s Institutes, the WILPF, NCW, the Association of University Women, Soroptimists Clubs, the Girl Guides Association, the National Council of Social Service, the International Friendship League, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Council for Education in World Citizenship, boys clubs and adult education classes. I am grateful to Elizabeth June Horder for allowing me to access this file.

Margins of Chaos is only one of the autobiographical published sources on which this study has drawn and the availability and complexity of the source materials is one of the central issues that has affected the construction of this narrative. Each chapter to some extent privileges different types of sources - the archival records of the Society of Friends and to a lesser extent other organisations, children's drawings and exhibition catalogues, photographs, personal diaries and correspondence where they are available, Francesca's journalism and leaflets, her autobiographical accounts written during the Second World War in which she drew on her earlier diaries and correspondence, and the much later autobiographical text posthumously published by her family. This latter publication requires some discussion as it has been referred to in the text but not discussed in detail. It is in many senses a multi-voiced text, written late in life and published posthumously, edited by her niece and supplemented with accounts by family and friends recalling their memories of her.⁶⁸ It has been used in this study for the insights it gives into her earlier life and for how Francesca herself reflected in later life on the significance of particular places and events. In using it in this way I have tried to remain mindful of the methodological issues involved in drawing on such a document, the fact that all autobiographies are fictionalised documents representing an individual's attempt to make sense and meaning of her life in retrospect.

A number of historians and biographers have discussed the use of later autobiographies as sources and Steedman, for example, drew attention in

⁶⁸ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*

particular to the need to scrutinise the subject's use of their childhood as an interpretive device. Through a critical analysis of McMillan's texts as historical and 'fictional' enterprises in their own right she demonstrated that McMillan reconstructed her childhood to find new symbolic places for it in her autobiography.⁶⁹ One can see a similar element at work in Francesca's 'autobiography' and her representation of her childhood can be used as an example of how she conferred meaning onto particular events. Several childhood moments are interpreted as signposts to her later life; one comes away, presumably as she intended, almost with the impression that she was predestined to live the life that she did. My contention is not that these events are necessarily 'untrue', but that they have been carefully selected for their value as literary motifs and reinterpreted to support the creation of a particular identity and image. Consequently their use by a biographer as evidence of her childhood in any potential biography requires careful analysis and interpretation. Their value lies in the way they provide an interesting illustration of how she felt she became the woman that she was. She described numerous events, for example, where she is portrayed, often self-deprecatingly or amusingly, as attempting to dispense relief to the poor, as if signalling her future relief work later in life:

We felt we ought to do good for the poor like the people in our books. It was in Elswick Park that we made up our minds. We would save up our sweets and give them away to poor children...It was not as easy as we had expected to find poor children in our bourgeois neighbourhood, but when I saw a little girl being wheeled along in a pushchair I dashed after her and dropped the liquorice into her lap only to be greeted with "I'll tell my ma on you. A nasty black coal on my clean dress. Go away you rude

⁶⁹ Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain*, pp 4-5

girl.” It was discomforting but our efforts with boiled sweets were happier although doubtfully received.⁷⁰

Similarly the following reference could be read as a signal to her future work with displaced children and her decision, when based in Birmingham in the late 1920s to adopt Russian émigré children:

Life to me was one long conspiracy with Muriel. We told each other endless stories. The everlasting story we called them. This was mostly about the lost children we were going to adopt when we grew up.⁷¹

Her future as a writer was also established in early childhood and confirmed by her governess, Miss Joyce:

I felt Muriel my superior in all except brains (Miss Joyce told everyone I was very sharp and I believed her and I thought I was a genius - I would one day write a wonderful book).⁷²

She consistently presented herself as an outsider or ‘other’ in the narrative, and again this can be read as a reminder to the reader of her lifelong championing and activism on behalf of displaced ‘others’ and a reflection of why she chose her particular path.⁷³ She presented herself as a doubting outsider within a religious family unable to share her parents and siblings convictions, an outsider at her girls High School set aside from the other girls by both background and character, at Newnham she initially doubted whether she would fit in, and as a teacher at the ECECG in Birmingham she described

⁷⁰ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 6

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p 8

⁷² *Ibid.*, p 9

⁷³ See for example *Ibid.*, pp 11, 16, 95, 114

herself as a 'rather freakish outsider'.⁷⁴

In recounting her experiences in her humanitarian autobiographies Francesca told a very 'public' life story; she was not given to introspection in her autobiographical narratives, that was not their purpose. Despite giving the appearance of writing a more personal account in *Life of Service and Adventure* through anecdotes such as those described above, it also remained a very public document. Moreover in summing up 'the main activities' of her life as 'teaching, relief work and writing' she provided a very public definition of how she conceived her identity.⁷⁵ Reading these autobiographical texts against the grain of surviving archival evidence in earlier chapters placed a spotlight on issues of truth, silence and ambiguity in Francesca's shaping of her life story. In Murcia for example I explored discrepancies in chronology and 'fact', where the narrative was manipulated to tell a broader 'truth'. Closely tied to this issue of truth are the silences and ambiguities found in the texts. In Birmingham I explored the issues caused by the fragmentary archival sources, or their administrative or functional nature. Many questions remain about Francesca's personal relationships, her religious beliefs, and her political allegiances, which can only be inferred or guessed at from the surviving documents. Earlier in this chapter I explored some of the silences around the questions of her motivation for engaging in relief work abroad. Another example of the unknown or contradictory is the degree to which she held

⁷⁴ Horder *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 114. Part of this feeling of being different is related to the 'puritanical' way in which she and her siblings had been brought up and there are references to her sister being laughed at for 'reading her Bible too assiduously' as school and she maintained that even within her extended Quaker family her mother's views set the children apart.

⁷⁵ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 131

pacifist views. Her references to her father's beliefs, her Quaker background, the circles in which she moved, her membership of the WILPF, and her writings on the effects of war, might all be taken as indications that she was sympathetic to the pacifist cause but whether she was an absolute pacifist is not known. Similarly, her published works are silent about the personal effects of witnessing trauma, starvation and death at first hand. What effect did witnessing horror at close quarters have on her emotionally? Her accounts although personalised by the use of vignettes and individual stories do not elaborate on the personal costs of working in theatres of war, and the lack of any publicly available diaries compound the silence. The tone of her diary from Vienna is very different to the tone of her published account, even admitting to feelings of depression and near despair at times, and one wonders how the survival of further diaries would illuminate this issue.

In considering Francesca's authorial voice I found Weiner's five key elements of 'truth-production' discussed earlier to be a useful framework within which to locate and analyse Francesca's auto/biographical writings.⁷⁶ All five are applicable to Francesca and can help us to understand how she created her own 'truths'. She certainly believed that her truth was worth telling and had the ability to tell it powerfully. She had a strong sense of market and of how her reporting of her work had significant fundraising potential. She was well-placed within a number of related and overlapping networks. Her background at Newnham College, and participation in Quaker and humanitarian agencies and women's political and educational organisations meant that she had access to,

⁷⁶ Weiner, 'The Truth and Harriet Martineau'

and some degree of control over, highly effective information channels. In addition to the printed word she also used the visual and radio broadcasts to promote her 'truth'; her access to this new media facilitated by her 'profile', a sense of authority derived from her books and printed journalism, and by her network of contacts.⁷⁷

Francesca told and re-told aspects of her life story on several occasions and all of the above elements inform how she constructed the narrative of her journey and how we as readers receive it. Bertha Bracey, the Birmingham born relief worker who reviewed *Aftermath* for the journal *International Affairs* in 1948, neatly captured the experience of reading Francesca's text as an illuminating journey around the war-torn countries of Central Europe with Francesca as guide and interpreter:

To travel with Francesca Wilson is to travel purposefully with a guide whose vision is penetrating, whose mind is active and whose heart is generous...With Francesca Wilson as interpreter, the confused kaleidoscope of European peoples, armies, relief workers, displaced persons, officials, nurses, doctors, patients and peasants becomes vivid and significant.⁷⁸

In undertaking this study I too have accompanied Francesca on a journey of my own, a journey in which I have travelled intellectually, emotionally and geographically. It is a journey that has been overwhelmingly stimulating, enjoyable and inspirational, whilst at the same time occasionally frustrating and

⁷⁷ Nikolaus Pevsner for example was a frequent radio broadcaster in the same period, and Helen Grant worked for a time for the BBC.

⁷⁸ Bertha L. Bracey, in *International Affairs*, 24, no. 3 (1948) p 433. Bracey worked in Vienna in the early 1920s and was the secretary of the Friends German Emergency Committee from its formation in 1933, assisting with the Kindertransport and later in 1945 organising the rescue of 300 child survivors from Theresienstadt to a reception camp at Lake Windermere, see Oldfield, *Women Humanitarians*, pp 27-8

sometimes maddening. In the next few pages I want to reflect on aspects of this journey and how it has influenced the story I have told.

My journey started in Birmingham where I was first introduced to Francesca's story and her book *In the Margins of Chaos*. Having worked as an archivist for over 15 years I had occasionally toyed with the idea of undertaking a higher degree and a systematic historical research project, one that went beyond the cataloguing of archival collections and the somewhat cursory research in which I engaged for work purposes. As a feminist I had a longstanding interest in women's history and in the life stories of women activists, and after a decade advising researchers at all levels about our archival holdings and their research potential I was only too aware of the lack of work on the history of women in Birmingham. Working in partnership with educational historians at the University of Birmingham and attending the Domus seminar series had broadened my interest in the histories of education and childhood. I was therefore ready for a subject to appear who would stimulate my interest sufficiently to persevere with a major research project alongside my professional career. But Birmingham is not short of interesting and ignored women educator activists so why Francesca in particular?

I was drawn to Francesca partly because she was a remarkable woman and it is such a good story. Initially, I focused primarily on the Spanish episode and was intrigued by the question of what motivated a history teacher in a Birmingham girls' school, who was rapidly approaching her fiftieth birthday, to pack her bags in the middle of term and travel to war-torn Spain? What

consequences, if any, did that decision have for the rest of her life? That such a woman activist had lived in Birmingham for a considerable period of time but was largely unknown was a strong motivation for wishing to write her into the city's history. I was also motivated by the fact that her story had deep resonances with contemporary debates on humanitarian aid, refugee and asylum policies, and the effects of war and displacement on the young. When I began my research the British press regularly featured stories about refugees and asylum seekers in which the adjective 'bogus' seemed ever-present. Living and working in a multicultural city in which new communities were arriving daily, and in which resentment against longstanding 'minority' communities and the newer arrivals seemed never far from the surface, I had been professionally engaged for some time in a discourse about how archives and diverse histories can be vehicles for learning and for fostering equality and social justice. Francesca's life story as a humanitarian educator activist seemed to me to reflect these issues and to raise significant questions about the relevance of historical life histories to contemporary issues and the transformative potential of educational interventions.

Researching any life history involves going on a journey with a subject, and the route taken does not always correspond to the mental map the researcher draws at the outset. Travelling with Francesca took me in directions which I had not envisaged at the beginning of my study and provided several 'points of departure'.⁷⁹ I had not anticipated that following in Francesca's footsteps would result in a growing interest on my part in the wider visual and textual

⁷⁹ Holmes, *Sidetracks*, p ix

representation of displaced children for example, or in the use of children's art and exhibitions as a means of giving voice to young refugees. Following paths which at the time I feared were distractions became central to my project and provided unexpected insights into Francesca's story and motivation. It also of course inevitably led to the identification of a large number of other women activists who could not be followed through as part of this study but who are now waiting in the wings.

As stated earlier, I began my research with Murcia as this seemed such a significant part of Francesca's activism in Birmingham and was the element of her story that had first interested me. I then moved backwards through time to Vienna before finally turning my attention to her life in Birmingham. I had originally intended that the three substantive chapters of this study would be read in that order, reflecting the course of my labour process in conducting the research and in writing the first drafts of each chapter. Following the introduction the reader would have met Francesca in Murcia, before reading her life backwards to Vienna, and from thence on to Birmingham, bidding her farewell as she departed for Murcia. In this way the narrative would have come full circle and would have followed my methodology and chronological journey. I had hoped that as my study focused on methodological issues in writing a life that some different insight might be gained from disrupting the historical chronology in this way. However, whilst writing the Birmingham chapter I realised that the interrelationship between it and Murcia, and the challenges for the reader of following an already complex story reading forward, backward, and forward again made it a difficult and frustrating

experience. I had to reluctantly admit that it was a conceit on my part, which added nothing to our understanding of Francesca.⁸⁰

In addition to the intellectual journey undertaken during my research I wanted to explore whether following physically in Francesca's footsteps would contribute to my knowledge and understanding of her life and activities as a travelling activist. Would visiting Vienna and Murcia, albeit in very different contexts and times, lead to any interpretative insight or illuminating sense of connection? Would I benefit from what Fraser has termed 'optical research', or 'going to places and looking at them', a practice which she finds 'almost as important in practising the art of biography, as my hours spent in archives'.⁸¹ What trace if any could I find of her in the landscape and would it make any difference to my understanding? Furthermore could I write about the experience in a way that didn't just relapse into an over-emotional sentimentality?

I knew Birmingham well of course, and had access to images and reports of life in the city in the 1920s and 1930s. I knew that the house in which she lived had been swept away as part of the 1960s redevelopment. The George Road meeting house and her school survive, in fact I had collected the surviving ECECG archives from its basement myself with a colleague only a few years earlier. But I had no detailed accounts by Francesca recording her response to the city, and I sensed that her emotional connection to Birmingham as a place

⁸⁰ For a defence of the traditional chronological format see Mark Kinkead-Weeks "Writing Lives Forwards: A Case for Strictly Chronological Biography", in France & St Clair, *Mapping Lives*, pp 235-52

⁸¹ Antonia Fraser, 'Optical Research', in Bostridge, *Lives For Sale*, 113-7 p 113

was slight. I wanted therefore to explore whether visiting the two European cities which were unfamiliar to me, and of which Francesca had written such lyrical descriptions, would provide any additional insight.

I visited Vienna in September 2006 and found its atmosphere of decaying imperial grandeur helpful in understanding Francesca's response to the city's history and architecture. Visiting the same baroque churches and streets that she described in her narrative gave a sense of placing her in the landscape - the Peter's Kirche, the Hofburg where she had an office, and of course 16 Singerstrasse, now turned into expensive shops and apartments. She was not exaggerating when she described it as a mausoleum. Standing in front of the former palace and within its inner courtyard I could appreciate how odd it must



Figure 21: 16 Singerstrasse, Vienna, September 2006

have been to live in its fading grandeur surrounded by post-war starvation, and how cold it must have been in the winter. All of this was useful in building up a picture of her life in Vienna but it was my visit to Murcia the previous year which provided most food for thought and it is this journey on which I want to dwell in more detail.

When I planned my visit to Murcia I had hoped that I would be able to find some trace of her, either within the living memory of people who were active in relief and educational circles during the Civil War, or in the physical landscape by locating some of the spaces in which she lived and worked. A Spanish colleague, Antonio Viñao Frago, had generously assisted with identifying individuals who might be able to recall Francesca and had arranged for me to visit and interview two women, Pilar Barnés and Clara Smilg, both former teachers who had been active in the Republican student movement *Federación Universitaria Escolar (FUE)* and cared for displaced children in a 'colony' or 'guarderia'.⁸² I hoped that they would remember Francesca and be able to tell me something of their impressions of her, her activities and relationships with her Spanish colleagues. I was extremely disappointed when neither woman recognised her photograph or recalled her name. My initial reaction was that this was somewhat surprising - Pilar had taught at the children's hospital established by Francesca, and Clara's father, a German Jew called Sidney (alias Santiago) Smilg, had been the Murcia Quakers' driver. Moreover Clara herself had developed a close friendship with Francesca's American colleague Emily Parker, of whom she spoke with great affection and

⁸² I interviewed both women whilst in Murcia. Clara didn't recognise the term colony but used *guarderia* or nursery.

warmth. Had I overestimated Francesca's role in the hospital and in the Murcia team?

On reflection I decided that this was not the case but reflected what we have already seen of Francesca's style of working, she travelled backwards and forwards between Murcia and Birmingham and therefore probably did not have the same motivation, or inclination, as Emily to establish close relationships with particular families in Murcia. Francesca's skill and interest lay in beginning initiatives rather than in providing a stable administrator for established projects. Although the hospital where Pilar taught her school classes owed its establishment to Francesca, she herself had already handed it over to others to run and moved on to her colonies at Crevillente and Benidorm, and would therefore only have been one of many interested foreign visitors to the hospital itself. The peripatetic nature of her life as a relief worker and humanitarian activist, going where need (or interest) took her, is one challenge which faces the historian attempting to locate a trace of her in living memory.

I sensed that Clara's failure to remember Francesca was of a different nature to Pilar's lack of recollection. By the time I interviewed her she was a bright but frail woman in her nineties who had recently been unwell, and after all the memories I was trying to excavate had taken place nearly seventy years earlier. She spoke movingly of her painful experiences and her constant fear in the years following the end of the war, and in addition to the usual considerations of memory and age this had a considerable bearing on her memory of the events. She explained that she did not remember some things

because she did not want to remember them; they were unpleasant times and she did not want them to have happened. The memories were too painful and were therefore suppressed. Tellingly she commented that she remembered 'more the feeling than the facts, unpleasant facts'. She remembered Emily with such clarity because she had loved her. Intriguingly she recalled going with Emily to a 'Quaker place' in Alicante province where they spent a day, and where they saw another, taller woman, but she did not remember anything about the camp, other than the tall woman and going with Emily. This is almost certainly a reference to Crevillente but Clara could not recall any of the details despite my impression that she very much wanted to remember for me. Apologetically she explained that she could only remember in pictures that she could still see, but not in names. As she spoke I speculated silently about the identity of the 'young Murcia teacher of foreign extraction' who had visited Francesca at Crevillente with Emily and spoken with her about the idealism of the International Brigades.⁸³

Despite the fact that neither Clara nor Pilar remembered Francesca, their memories and willingness to talk of their experiences gave me two very different insights into Francesca and her life in Murcia. Not only did listening to Clara recount her life story and her experiences in Murcia before, during, and after the war give me a glimpse of Murcia at the time when Francesca would have known it, but it also echoed Francesca's interest in life histories and reinforced my understanding of their power and her fascination with the conversations of those people who interested her. There is something very

⁸³ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 186. Clara was born in South Africa to a German Jewish family who moved to Spain when she was young.



Figure 22: Clara Smilg, May 2005

strange in meeting in person an elderly woman whom I had previously encountered as the ‘fine girl’ recorded in the FSC files co-operating with Emily Parker on her recreational work in schools and who ‘volunteered her services in teaching many of the staff that are learning Spanish’.⁸⁴ I found my meeting with Clara profoundly moving, and through my conversation with her I also came to see how a place can colour a person’s identity and how its relationship with that identity can shift according to circumstance. Murcia was a very different place for Clara from the creative, welcoming and thrilling place that it represented in Francesca’s experience. For Clara Murcia began as a place of hope and opportunity. She was born in South Africa and her family had moved

⁸⁴ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/1, “Projects by Classification”, [September-October 1938]; see also FL, FSC/R/SP/5, “Milk Madness”, 18 July 1938

to Southern Spain when she was very young. They settled in Murcia to secure a secondary education for her and she recalled with pride joining the FUE with her fellow students at the Normal School, wearing their FUE uniform of white dresses to signify their membership and political allegiance, and their pride in their work with refugee children from Madrid. However, for her Murcia rapidly became a place of fear, intimidation and loss; the FUE were Republicans and 'the others were the enemies'. Her fiancé was killed in the conflict and after the Nationalist victory she was afraid to go out; her father was imprisoned initially in Murcia and then in Madrid where Clara travelled on her own to visit him, a journey which at the end of the war required considerable bravery in a young Republican woman. After he was returned to Murcia and placed under house arrest Clara recalled that she 'started to be afraid of everybody'. Emily kept up her correspondence, letters from America and elsewhere, which Clara read and then destroyed for fear of their discovery, or of denouncement by right wing colleagues at the school where she taught, or neighbours in the building where she lived.⁸⁵ My initial worries about prompting Clara to remember and talk about a period in her life which was so obviously laden with pain were alleviated when at the end of her interview she thanked me warmly for coming to talk to her. Her final remarks to me that civil war is the greatest of all evils, and that people should talk about it to ensure that it never happens again struck me powerfully and I left her flat feeling profoundly moved, extremely inadequate, and ill-equipped to fulfil the overwhelming sense of responsibility and expectation that she seemed to have given to me with her story. For a brief moment I felt that I could identify with Francesca's motivation to give voice

⁸⁵ Clara's unusual proficiency in both German and English meant that she was allowed to work as a teacher of languages at a time when teachers who were known to have been Republicans were called to a tribunal and prevented from teaching.

to the stories which were given to her by the refugees and others whom she met.

At the outset of my journey to Murcia I had hoped to find physical traces of Francesca, buildings in which she had lived and the sites of her relief work. Unfortunately neither the FSC files nor any of her writings gave any clues to the geographic location of Pablo Iglesias or the other refuges and workshops, but I hoped to be able to find the houses in which she lived and the site of the Children's Hospital. Walking around the city in the heat of May certainly made me reflect thankfully that I was not in Murcia during 'burning hot' August as Francesca had been.⁸⁶ I could sympathise with her comment that 'Murcia was made up of narrow, twisting passages, and edifices which, though jery-built, were several stories high, so that one could slink along in shade most of the time'.⁸⁷ Nothing remained of Francesca's December 1937 home at number 4 Calle de Manresa, the street was occupied by modern buildings. In Calle San Nicolas, where she lived for most of her period in the city I was again disappointed to discover a very new building at number 25, although the obvious age of the rest of the narrow street, and the tiled entrance hall of the house next door gave me a reasonable idea of what the Quaker home there would have looked like from the outside.⁸⁸

On my second evening in Murcia, a few hours after we had left Clara I went for a walk with Antonio along the Malecon, which Francesca described as:

⁸⁶ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 189

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ The American Quaker Ruth Cope provides a description of it in a letter to her family on 21 September 1938, quoted in Fyrth, *Women's Voices*, pp 213-4

the great promenade of Murcia. Even during the war it was always crowded at sunset, the time of the Spanish paseo, mainly with girls walking arm in arm with each other and tossing their heads haughtily at the saucy remarks addressed them as homage by black-eyed Republican soldiers or blue-eyed International Brigaders. At one side of the Malecon are groves of date palms and orange trees, on the other the rushing brown river and the vast blue-green *huerta* ringed with tawny hills.⁸⁹

The Malecon had changed somewhat since Francesca wrote this description, a little more concrete and a little less greenery, but as we walked past the former General Hospital, which once housed British members of the International Brigades, it was relatively easy to imagine Francesca looking out over the Malecon from the windows of her first home in Murcia at Plano de San Francisco behind us. Armed with a copy of *Margins of Chaos* we were looking for the Children's Hospital, as Antonio thought that there were one or two villas on the Malecon which might be possible contenders. Unfortunately again we were disappointed. As we walked back we passed the gateway of Clara's school, where she and Emily had mixed milk for the children of Murcia. The site is still home to a school although a considerably more modern building now stands there.

It was during the conversation with Pilar that I received a crucial clue to the location of the children's hospital.⁹⁰ Despite the language barrier it was another moving interview, she had obviously found some of her recollections painful and again I felt a sense of deep responsibility towards someone who

⁸⁹ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 189-90

⁹⁰ Interview by the author with Pilar Barnés, 18 May 2005. I knew something of Pilar already as she had published an autobiography, a copy of which she very kindly gave me before I left, Pilar Barnés, *El Gozo de mis Raíces y su Entorno* (Lorca: Ayuntamiento de Lorca, 2000) Pilar speaks no English and I was very thankful for the presence of Antonio who made up for my extremely deficient Spanish.



Figure 23: Pilar Barnés, shown with her autobiography, May 2005

was prepared to give her memories so freely and share what was obviously such a painful story at times. Pilar had taught at the Children's Hospital and although she did not remember Francesca, only an 'Australian nurse' who ran the hospital (probably Dorothy Morris from New Zealand), she was adamant that the building was very near the University. We returned to Murcia and went in search of the hospital in the area where Pilar had described, and there it was, on the Calle Puerta Nueva, around the corner from the University, and now apparently used as offices. The area had changed considerably; the empty ground around it shown in Francesca's photograph (figures 12 and 13) now built up, and the addition of two very tall trees alongside the palm tree, but apart from minor changes, it was clearly the same building which had so

excited Francesca when she saw in it 1937 and described it as ‘the best house in Murcia... a very modern villa standing in its own grounds, beautifully fitted out and equipped’.⁹¹



Figure 24: Former Children's Hospital, May 2005

Discovering that the building was still there was a very satisfying feeling, at the time I felt it was the most substantial connection to Francesca in Murcia. An unknown and unrecognised monument to the efforts of both the foreign relief workers and the Spanish authorities who worked so hard to provide relief to the child refugees of Murcia. Its unrecognised status also seemed to provide a metaphor for the total absence of any reference to the Civil War in the streets

⁹¹ FL, FSC/R/SP/3/2, FMW to FSC, 9 June 1937

or architecture of the city, and a reminder that 'if History is the winners' story, then the radical historian exploring the politics of space needs to look for absence and listen to silence'.⁹² Clara and Pilar's profoundly emotional response to that period of Spanish history had been real enough, but nowhere did this seem to be reflected in the city's landscape. I had been told that the war memorial to the Nationalist fallen of the war had recently been removed from the Plaza de San Domingo, as in other Spanish towns and cities the memorial only commemorated the fallen of one side in the conflict and was therefore not now deemed to be appropriate. Similarly I had been very struck in the city's museum, the Museo de la Ciudad, by the almost total lack of any reference to the war, limited to one sentence recording the fact that during the civil war 44 refugios had been constructed to house 17,000 people. The timeline around the room in the museum devoted to the twentieth century conveniently jumped from 1928 to 1946, ignoring the 1930s entirely and reflecting the unwillingness to discuss the conflict and its divisive legacy.⁹³ In Cartagena where Francesca had established a workshop I discovered a different attitude to that in the museum at Murcia. The Refugio-Museo Guerra Civil is constructed inside one of the underground refugios on the Calle Gisbert, built to shelter 5,500 people from the aerial bombardment of the strategically important port town of Cartagena. It was a strange experience to be inside the cavernous space watching film footage of the bombing of the city by the Condor Legion in October and November 1936 and people fleeing into the shelter of the building in which we were now standing. This was a very

⁹² Walkowitz & Knauer, *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*, p viii

⁹³ On the long-term legacy of the war see among others Preston, *The Politics of Revenge*; Aguilar, "Agents of memory"

different attitude to interpreting the war to that in Murcia, although telling the story by focusing on the refugios and the effects of the conflict on civilian life was probably less contentious than focusing on the conflict itself and the political and ideological divisions which led to it.⁹⁴

Murcia and Spain were the starting point for my interest and research into Francesca's activism, and recalling my journey to Murcia here is a fitting place to bring this study to a close. In writing my study I have engaged with many of the problematics and possibilities discussed in the opening chapter. Many of the issues relating to Francesca's authorial voice, the interpretation of her autobiographical texts, and the contradictions and ambiguities of the relationship with the archival evidence, echo Ellis' reflection quoted in the opening chapter that writing the life of a subject who told and retold her own life is indeed a 'tricky business'.⁹⁵ That said, adopting both Pimlott and DeSalvo's advice to concentrate on the story I wanted to tell about Francesca's life in the interwar period in a series of portraits located in three particular cities has provided a powerful way of interrogating those complexities and nuances to tease out what her life and activism have to tell us about broader contexts and histories.⁹⁶

Bringing an extended study to some form of closure is always difficult and I would like to do so here with three related observations. The first relates to

⁹⁴ The Museum's ideological stance was reflected in the last part of the display which used children's art from the conflict and contemporary work by local school children on war and peace 'devoted to helping us understand that peace is the only basis for human existence', quoted in *The Guide to Refugio Museo De la Guerra Civil/ Civil War Air-Raid Shelter and Museum*, in Spanish and English, section 6

⁹⁵ Ellis, *Literary Lives*, p 8

⁹⁶ Pimlott, "Brushstrokes", p 170; DeSalvo, "Advice to Aspiring Educational Biographers", p 270

Francesca herself, my relationship with her as a subject and the question of whether I feel I know her. Much has been written about the biographer's perception of her relationship with her subject but rather less about how the subject, if she were able, might react to the representation of her.⁹⁷ Very few biographers explicitly ask their subject the question which Virginia Woolf asked Vita Sackville-West, the model for her experimental biographical fiction *Orlando*, 'What are you really like? ... Do you exist? Have I made you up?'⁹⁸ Would Francesca think I had made her up? Would she recognise herself? Or would she react in the same way as the subjects in Zemon Davis' *Women on the Margins*, forcing their biographer to come out of the shadows to justify herself and end on a plea for their understanding, entreating them to 'Let me explain...Give me another chance. Read it again'.⁹⁹ On reflection, I think that I know her well enough to hope that even if she disagreed with some of my interpretations, as an author who used life stories and auto/biographical practices to great educational and political effect, she would at least recognise some similarities of process and motivation in my telling of her story and agree with the broader truth within it.

My second observation focuses specifically on the questions raised in this study that remain unanswered or ambiguous. One of the most significant for me is the role that her religious background and faith played in her life. Whilst

⁹⁷ See for example Carol Ascher, Louise DeSalvo, & Sara Ruddick, eds., *Between Women: Biographers, Novelists, Critics, Teachers and Artists Write About their Work on Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); Blanche Wiesen Cook, "The Issue of Subject: A Critical Connection", in Kridel, *Writing Educational Biography*, pp 79-99; Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Subject to Biography: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Writing Women's Lives* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1998)

⁹⁸ Nigel Nicolson, *Letters of Virginia Woolf*, quoted in Kaplan, 'A Culture of Biography' p 7

⁹⁹ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1997) prologue

undertaking this study I have changed my opinion several times as each new fragment of evidence differed from or contradicted a previous one. From the comments of family and friends which led me to believe that she had no faith, to the discovery that she had retained her membership of the Society of Friends throughout the period under study, I have come to conclude that I will never know for certain, even if further archival evidence emerges in the form of diaries or correspondence; that indeed she herself probably remained uncertain or changed her position a number of times during the course of her life. Like all of us she was a person of contradictions, and was perceived differently by different friends, family members, and colleagues. To borrow her own phrase when writing about Eglantyne Jebb, Francesca was ‘by no means a run-of-the-mill do-gooder’.¹⁰⁰ One of her friends who knew her in Budapest in 1940 recalled her thus: ‘She smoked, swore mildly, and took rum in her tea. Good works with an interesting Bohemian flavour’.¹⁰¹ In the end what matters is what she did on behalf others, and the meaning she gave to it; how she lived out her activism and her own particular ‘faith’ or value system.

Finally, I would like to return to Stanley’s notion of auto/biography as a kaleidoscope, an unfinished and potentially never ending project.¹⁰² The research and interpretations which form the basis of this study are very much a moment frozen in time. Francesca recalled that she and her sister Muriel told each other an endless, ‘everlasting story’ and I suspect that Francesca’s life

¹⁰⁰ Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, p 9

¹⁰¹ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, part II, p 30

¹⁰² Stanley, “Biography as Microscope or Kaleidoscope?”, p 30

story will be my everlasting, never-ending project.¹⁰³ As the Armenian refugee artist Arshile Gorky wrote of his paintings:

When something is finished, that means it's dead, doesn't it. I believe in everlastingness. I never finish a painting - I just stop working on it for a while. The thing to do is always to keep starting to paint. Never finish a painting.¹⁰⁴



Figure 25: Francesca, late 1970s

¹⁰³ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 8

¹⁰⁴ Caption to *Untitled 1943-48* taken from the exhibition *Arshile Gorky: A Retrospective*, Tate Modern, 2010

APPENDIX ONE

SUPPORTING ACTORS

Individuals appear in this list if they appear in several places in the text.

Nicolai Bachtin

Nicolai Bachtin was born in Orel, Russia, in 1896, the son of a civil servant and member of the Russian nobility, and elder brother of the better-known and influential cultural critic Mikhail Bakhtin. After an education at the University of St. Petersburg Bachtin had enlisted as a hussar and subsequently served in the First World War and with the French Foreign Legion in North Africa where he was wounded in 1923. In 1924 he moved to Paris where he was part of a white Russian émigré intellectual circle and served on the editorial board of the journal *Zveno*.¹ Francesca met him in Paris in 1928 and he later moved to Britain permanently in 1932, beginning in Cambridge, then moving to the University of Southampton and finally to the University of Birmingham from 1938 where he lectured in classics and established the Linguistics Department. He was a close friend of Ludwig Wittgenstein. He married Constance Pantling and his stormy personality was one of the reasons that it was not a happy marriage. They both joined the Communist Party in the 1930s. From 1928 to his death in 1950 he was one of the most influential people in Francesca's life.

¹ UoBSC, US 5 File IV, typescript biographical portrait by Francesca

Hilda Clark

Clark was born into a Quaker family in 1881. She was inspired by her aunt Dr. Annie Clark, one of the first British women medical practitioners, to train in medicine at Birmingham University and later briefly returned to the city to work at Birmingham Maternity Hospital in 1909-10. Whilst training in London 1906-08 she met Edith Pye who became her lifelong companion and collaborator in political and humanitarian activities.² At the outbreak of the First World War she was instrumental in initiating the Friends' active response to civilian distress in Europe and undertook relief work in France.³ In 1919 she was prompted to visit Vienna by the reports of the conditions there by a family friend, General Jan Smuts, and convinced the FEWRC to establish a relief mission there under her direction. Her sister Alice Clark also worked for the FEWRC. Vienna marked the beginning of a longstanding connection between Francesca and Clark. In 1929 Francesca travelled to Macedonia for the WILPF at Clark's behest. Clark was also active with refugees and the FSC during the 1930s and 1940s, and they both worked with Spanish refugees in the South of France in 1939.

Kathleen D'Olier Courtney

Born in 1878 Courtney studied French and German at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, arriving there two years before her fellow student, Eglantyne Jebb. It was there that she met Maude Royden (a member of Francesca's CAEF

² Sandra Stanley Holton, "Clark, Hilda (1881-1955)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/38518> [Accessed 3 March 2005]

³ Fry, *A Quaker Adventure*, pp xv, 1-90; Margaret E. Hirst, *The Quakers in Peace and War. An Account of Their Peace Principles and Practice* (London: The Swarthmore Press Ltd., 1923) pp 497-8

committee) who became a lifelong friend and collaborator. After leaving Oxford she taught in a Lady Margaret Hall settlement and girls club in Lambeth and became involved in suffrage campaigns, becoming honorary secretary of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies until Millicent Fawcett's decision to support the government's war effort led to her resignation alongside half of the NUWSS executive. She was one of three British women to attend The Hague peace conference in 1915 and was one of the founders of the WILPF. She retained a lifelong interest in international issues, was active in a number of international women's organisations and was a leading member of the League of Nations Union and later the United Nations Association.⁴ She undertook relief work with Serbs during the First World War in Salonika and Corsica and was involved in Quaker relief in Vienna in the post-war period where she and Francesca met. They remained friends; Francesca used to stay with her at her home in Hampstead during the Second World War, and then lived relatively close by in Fellows Road. In later life Francesca was working on an authorized biography of Courtney, and she was one of the three women Francesca intended as subjects for her group biography, *Three Twentieth Century Women of Action*.

Muriel Davies

Francesca met Davies at Newnham and they became lifelong friends. Davies was born in Birmingham on 21st January 1885, and educated at King Edward VI High School for Girls before attending Newnham College 1905-09. She received her M.A. from Newnham in 1926 and was an Associate, 1937-53. She

⁴ See Janet E. Grenier "Courtney, Dame Kathleen D'Olier (1878-1974)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37316> [Accessed 3 March 2005]

taught at Bath High School for Girls, 1910-13 and at ECEGC, 1914-20, before becoming Head Mistress at Nuneaton High School, 1920-26, and subsequently at Streatham High School 1926-47. She also played hockey for England.⁵ She was a governor of Bedford College for a number of years and was also involved in the Association of Head Mistresses. She adopted four sons and later added three girls to her family, two of whom were German refugees. When she retired in 1947 she went to work in a 'small factory, as she felt that was the country's most urgent need' at the time.⁶ She died aged 95 in 1980. Davies travelled with Francesca and Grant to Spain in 1937, and Francesca's adopted children often stayed with Davies when Francesca herself was away. Francesca wrote that she 'might have fallen in love' with Muriel Davies, or David as she called her, when they were both teaching in Bath had she received any encouragement but does not go into any further detail.⁷

Esther Farquhar

Farquhar was from Wilmington, Ohio. She was the first AFSC representative in Republican Spain and joined Francesca in Murcia. She was a trained teacher and social worker and had previously served in missionary work in Cuba. She had an interest in child psychology and in the benefits of play in particular. In addition to taking over the Murcia children's hospital she also took over the

⁵ Newnham College Register Vol. 1, p 185

⁶ Letter from Laura C. Jewell Hill, Headmistress of Rosa Bassett School, 1948-63, in Newnham College Archive

⁷ Horder, *Francesca Wilson: A Life of Service and Adventure*, p 133

administration of Sir George Young's hospitals in Almeria and Alicante in late 1937. She suffered from ill health whilst in Spain and had to return to the USA to recuperate in May 1938.⁸

Geoffrey Garratt

Born in 1888 he had been an administrator in India until 1921, and was also a journalist and author. A member of the Labour Party, he was a leading member of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief during the Civil War.⁹ He was in Francesca's travelling party to Spain in March 1937 and collaborated with her to bring food to Murcia.

Helen Grant

Born in Clifton in 1903, Grant was an Assistant Lecturer in Spanish at the University of Birmingham and had long standing connections to educational reformers and political activists in Spain. She was active in the BCPL and was the author of its pro-Republican pamphlet *Rebellion in Spain* published in January 1937.¹⁰ She addressed numerous meetings on the Spanish Civil War, including meetings at the University, for the Labour Party, and one arranged by Francesca for her pupils at the ECECG. She travelled with Francesca to Spain in March 1937 and her detailed journal of the journey and a later oral history interview provide key insights into Francesca's thinking and a contemporary

⁸ Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief*, pp 52-9

⁹ See Takenhiko Honda, "Garratt, Geoffrey Theodore (1888-1942)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39642> [accessed 4 March 2005]

¹⁰ BA&H, Birmingham Institutions D25: 459875

account to compare with Francesca's own.¹¹ Grant later stood as a Labour candidate for Marylebone in the local elections of November 1938 and referred to her activities in support of the Spanish Republican cause in her election leaflet.¹² She later worked for the BBC Spanish Service during the Second World War until she was dismissed following a political disagreement with her superiors. She wrote Francesca's obituary in *The Times*, and died herself in 1992.¹³

Alfred Jacob

Jacob was born in the USA but came to England to take a degree in Spanish and History at Oxford. He took British citizenship and married a Norma Sherlock, a British Quaker who was also involved in relief in Spain. They returned to the USA to live with their children in 1940.¹⁴ Jacob was the first FSC representative in Spain in 1936. He was based in Barcelona and became the central figure of Quaker relief in Republican Spain. He was a supporter and advocate of colonies and believed them to be the most effective way of caring for the children in Spain. It was hearing Jacob talk of his experiences and of the great need that prompted Francesca to return to relief work and she subsequently travelled to Spain in March 1937 in the same party as Norma Jacob. Mendlesohn describes him as being moved by a personal spiritual concern, and as being very partisan in support of the Republican cause.¹⁵

¹¹ IWM Sound Archive 13808/1/1, oral history interview by Jim Fyrth with Helen Grant

¹² CUL, Helen Grant Papers, MS ADD 8251/III, election leaflet of Helen Grant

¹³ Biographical details from introduction to the catalogue of her papers at CUL

¹⁴ Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief*, p 2

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 20, 24-7

Geraldine Emma May (Gem) Jebb

Gem was a cousin of Eglantyne Jebb and was born in 1886. She went up to Newnham College as a student in 1909. Francesca met her later at Newnham when Gem was a lecturer in Economics there in 1917, but got to know her well when she taught at Armstrong College, Newcastle between 1919 and 1929. She was appointed Principal of Bedford College in 1929 and remained there until her retirement in 1951.¹⁶ She died in 1959. Her sister Eglantyne worked in the Department of Education at Birmingham University from 1919 until she left to become principal of the Froebel Institute at Roehampton in c. 1932. Gem was one of the three women Francesca intended as subjects for her group biography, *Three Twentieth Century Women of Action*.

Madeline Alberta Linford

Born 1885. Worked as a journalist for *The Manchester Guardian* and reported from post-war Europe in 1919, which may be how she and Francesca met.¹⁷ She was the feminist editor of its women's section between 1923-35. She retired from the paper in 1953.¹⁸ She was also an author and, among other works, published a biography of Mary Wollstonecraft in 1924. She died in 1975.

¹⁶ Wilson, "Gem Jebb: A Portrait", RHUL Archives, BC RF141/1/1.

¹⁷ Letter from her niece Sylvia Michaelides, *The Guardian*, 30 July 2007

¹⁸ Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004) p 109

Margaret McFie

Margaret Stewart McFie was born in Oxford in 1890 and subsequently read modern languages at Somerville, Oxford, before researching the Song of Roland at the Sorbonne in the years before the First World War. In 1912 she started teaching English part time at a Bordeaux lycée whilst continuing her research, before joining the staff of Priorsfield Girls School as French Mistress in 1913.¹⁹ She joined the Serbian Relief Fund in 1915 and it was in that capacity that Francesca met her in 1917 when they travelled to Corsica to undertake relief work together. McFie married a Serb, Mika Dimitrijevitich, and returned with him to live in Belgrade where she was one of the founders of an Institute for the Blind at Semlin. Mika died in 1931 and McFie and her children settled in England. After borrowing money to complete a course in institutional management at King's College, London, McFie secured a post as housekeeper at Bridlington Girls High School and in 1934 she was appointed Domestic Bursar at Newnham where Francesca, as a Newnham Associate from 1942-55, would often stay with her.²⁰ Francesca remained close to her until McFie's death in 1971. McFie was one of the three women Francesca intended as subjects for her group biography, *Three Twentieth Century Women of Action*.

Katherine MacPhail

Francesca first met Dr. Katherine MacPhail in 1916 whilst they were both undertaking relief work in Samoëns, France, where Francesca described her

¹⁹ Wilson, Margaret Stewart McFie 1890-1971, CUFOSL, IH A/33

²⁰ CUFOS, IBH A/33, pp 25-7

as her 'most romantic' colleague.²¹ She had worked with the Scottish Women's Hospital Unit in Serbia in 1914 where she caught typhus. After the Armistice she established a Children's Hospital in Belgrade, funded in part by the SCF, where Francesca visited her.²² In 1934 she sold the buildings to the Yugoslav Government and established another hospital for children suffering the effects of tuberculosis at Sremska Kamenitza where she worked until taken prisoner by the Italians in 1941. She was repatriated to Scotland on her release but returned to her children's hospital in 1945.²³

Dorothy North

Dorothy North, later North Haskins, was born in Chicago in 1886 and was educated at Bryn Mawr College. She worked at Hull House settlement, Chicago, 1910-17. From 1917-23 she undertook relief work for the AFSC in France, Austria and Russia. She lived in Ongar, Essex, 1935-49, with her husband Sidney G. Haskins where she became involved in the Women's Institute and also worked with the Women's Voluntary Service with evacuees during the Second World War.²⁴ She and Francesca worked together in Vienna and Russia and became friends. North and her husband assisted Francesca to buy her house in Fellows Road, London, after the Second World War and they holidayed together. She died in Illinois in 1962.

²¹ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 10-1. For an account of MacPhail's life and work see IWM Manuscripts Department, unpublished biography of Dr. Katherine Stuart MacPhail by Jean Bray, 1972

²² See Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, pp 187-198

²³ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, pp 103-4, Wilson, *Rebel Daughter*, pp 188-98

²⁴ *Dorothy North Haskins Papers* [online] Bryn Mawr College Library: Special Collections Department, <http://www.brynmawr.edu/library/speccoll/guides/haskins.html> [Accessed 5 January 2005]

Emily Parker

Parker was a colleague of Farquhar in the AFSC and arrived in Murcia in Spring 1938 when she was in her late twenties. Mendlesohn describes her as the AFSC worker who most strongly demonstrated the 'traditional witness of concern'.²⁵ She had an interest in education and in children's play and when she arrived in Murcia she took over some of Francesca's workshops. Francesca described her as the 'staunchest of all' her allies who 'adored' children, was very short and round, but who had 'tireless energy'.²⁶ In Murcia she became very close to a young teacher Clara Smilg, and she corresponded with her for several years after she left Spain. Parker was the last Quaker worker to leave Murcia in 1939. She was later active in relief work with displaced Japanese Americans.

Frida Stewart

Stewart was a Communist from Cambridge and worked with Francesca in Murcia. She was interned by the Germans during the Second World War, worked with the Free French in London following her escape, and was subsequently politically active throughout her life. She married B.C.J.G. Knight in 1944.²⁷ Her sister, the musician Catherine Thomson, was for many years the leader of the socialist Clarion Singers choir in Birmingham and was married to Bachtin's colleague at the University of Birmingham, George Thomson.²⁸

²⁵ Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief*, pp 52-9

²⁶ Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p 207

²⁷ Jackson, *British Women and the Spanish Civil War*, pp 236-7

²⁸ The Thomson papers and the Clarion Singers Archive are held by BA&H

Dorothy Thomson

Assistant secretary to the Spain Committee of the FSC at Friends House during the Spanish Civil War.

Barbara Wood

FSC representative in Valencia, during the Spanish Civil War. She travelled with Francesca to Spain on her first journey there in March 1937.

APPENDIX TWO

Sian Roberts, "Exhibiting Children at Risk: child art, international exhibitions and Save the Children Fund in Vienna, 1919-1923", *Paedagogica Historica*, 45, nos. 1 & 2 (2009)

APPENDIX THREE

Sian Roberts, “In the Margins of Chaos”: Francesca Wilson and education for all in the “Teacher’s Republic”, *History of Education*, 35, no. 6, (2006)

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